

Mike Seager Thomas (ed)

# WALLY'S WAR



THE WW2 NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN DIARIES  
OF WALTER VON SCHRAMM OF THE NZ GRAVES  
REGISTRATION & ENQUIRIES UNIT





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ARTEFACT SERVICES  
LEWES



2024

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*Research Papers 13 (ASRP 13)*

*Wally's War*  
*The WW2 North African Campaign Diaries of Walter von Schramm of the NZ*  
*Graves Registration & Enquiries Unit*

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Original text, editorial, original photography, graphics and page set by  
Artefact Services  
© 2024 Mike Seager Thomas  
ISBN 978-1-0685961-1-7

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### **Cautionary note**

The diary presented here reflects and depicts the attitudes and personal expression of the 1940s, and includes terms for national and racial groups, which we would not use today. Some of these expressions are repeated in my commentary. It should also be noted that the photographs used to illustrate this volume include images of both military graves and cemeteries, and of unburied military dead.

MST

## LIST OF (MILITARY) ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE DIARY TEXT

2NZE	Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force(s)
323	unknown
AA	anti-aircraft
AAG	Assistant Adjutant General
ADS	Advanced Dressing Station
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AMPC	Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps
APM	Assistant Provost Martial
APO	Army Post Office
AT	anti-tank
AWL, AWOL	absent without leave
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
BOD	Base Ordinance Depot
BRD	Base Reception Depot
Brig.	Brigadier
BTE	British Troops in Egypt
Capt., Capts	Captain(s)
CB	confined to barracks
CCS	Casualty Clearing Station
CMP	Corps of Military Police
Coy, Coys	Company(s)
Col., Cols	Colonel(s)
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
DA	Deputy Assistant

DAAC	unknown
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DADOS	Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Services
DAD	Deputy Assistant Director
DADAPS	Deputy Assistant Director Army Postal Services
DADGRU	Deputy Assistant Director Graves Registration Unit
DAGRU	Deputy Assistant Graves Registration Unit
DAQMG	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General
DDMS	Deputy Director Medical Services
DID	Detail Issue Depot
Div.	Division
Div. Cav.	Divisional Cavalry
FFC	<i>Forces Françaises Combattantes</i>
EFI	Expeditionary Forces Institute
FGCM	Field General Court Martial
FMC	Forward Maintenance Centre
FPO	Field Post Office
FSD	Field Supply Depot
GCU	Graves Concentration Unit
GHQ	General Headquarters
GRE, GREME, GREMEF	Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Force
GRU	Graves Registration Unit
HAA	heavy anti-aircraft
HE	high explosive
HMS	His Majesty's Ship



HMT	His Majesty's Transport
HQ	Head Quarters
LAD	Light Aid Detachment
LG	Landing Ground
L. Sgt	Lance Sergeant
Lt	Lieutenant
Lt Col.	Lieutenant Colonel
LMG	light machine gun
L of C	Line of Communication
MBO	unknown
MDS	Main Dressing Station
ML	Motor Launch
MO	Medical Officer
MS	Military Secretary
NIT	unknown
NZA	New Zealand Army
NZAPC	New Zealand Army Pay Corps
NZGH	New Zealand General Hospital
NZGREU, NZ GRU	New Zealand Graves Registration & Enquiry (or Enquiries) Unit
O2E	Second Echelon
OC	Officer in Command
OCTU	Officer Cadet Training Unit
OFP	Ordinance Field Park
OR, ORs	Other Ranks
Ord.	Ordinance
Pln	Platoon
PO	Pilot Officer
POW, POWs	Prisoner(s) of War

Pte	Private
Q, QM	Quartermaster
RA	Royal Artillery
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RE	Royal Engineers
Recce	reconnaissance
Recce'd	reconnoitred
Reif., Reifs	Reinforcement(s)
RMT	Reserve Mechanical or Motor Transport
ROO	Railhead Ordnance Officer
RQ, RQM	Regimental Quartermaster
SAA	small arms ammunition
SAAF	South African Air Force
SAEC	South African (Army) Engineer Corps
Sgt	Sergeant
SIB	Special Investigation Branch
Sigs	Signals
SPS	unknown
TS	?Training School
UDF	(South African) Union Defence Force
WO	Warrant Officer
WP	Water Point

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### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my—and Wally's—friend, *Afrikakorps* collector and historian, Dal McGuirk, for his generosity in passing on Wally's personal North African campaign diaries to me, for providing many of the photos used here, and for kindly visiting and reporting on the Auckland War Memorial Museum's von Schramm archive for me. Mr McGuirk and I would like to thank Madison Pine of the AWMM for navigating Mr McGuirk through the museum's archives; and I would like to thank Greg Cave of Mount Albert Grammar School, for searching the school's records for me, and Sarah Quinn of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, for providing useful information about CWGC cemeteries in North Africa today. I must also thank the other individuals and institutions (where known, acknowledged by name in the List of Figures), whose photographs, generously placed online by them, illustrate this volume. *Wally's War* is being published on ANZAC Day, 2024, as a gesture of respect to the many New Zealanders and other (former) Dominion soldiers who fought side-by-side with UK forces during WW2, whose war was as much with the UK, as against the axis. Perhaps as countries with a common culture and a common history we may one day recover that relationship.

## THOUGHTS ON MINQAR EL ZANNAN MILITARY CEMETERY

Where sleep you tonight, Marawar Khan?  
Not in your native land, but far away;  
Far o'er the Indian seas.  
With Sepoy Mehar Singh, and Hayat Chul.  
Stern swarthy men of a hardy breed,  
Rest now in peace on Libyan sands.

Nearby lie others too,  
From New Zealand, South Africa and Homeland;  
Men in the pride of youth,  
Black and white and brown,  
Who for the King-Emperor have paid their due.

Small gift though it be,  
Gladly was it given that men might be freed  
From hatred, envy, malice, greed.

So rest the dead; Polaris and Spica gleam overhead,  
And brethren all in spite of race  
Bear now mute testimony  
That long ago it was truly said:  
"Be thou faithful unto death,  
And I will give you a crown of life."

Minqar el Zannan,  
9-12-41.

Sydney W. Josland, Capt., NZ GRU



**Figure 1**  
Wally's personal diaries (photo: MST)

## INTRODUCTION

### WALTER VON SCHRAMM, HIS DIARIES AND THE NEW ZEALAND GRAVES REGISTRATION & ENQUIRIES UNIT

One of the lesser-known WW2 UK and Dominion Forces unit types was the Graves Registration and Enquiries Unit (GREU), or the Graves Registration Unit (GRU). These units were located behind the lines and were responsible for curating the war dead between their burial—theoretically by front line troops but not infrequently by the GRUs themselves—and their concentration into permanent war cemeteries. This volume presents the wartime diaries (**Figure 1**) of the Officer in Command of one such unit, the New Zealand Graves Registration and Enquiries Unit (NZGREU), during and immediately after the war's North African campaign. The diaries run from January 1941 to July 1943 and cover his journey from the UK to Egypt, his initial service in Egypt with a training battalion based at Maadi Camp outside Cairo, his service in Egypt and Libya with the NZGREU, and his return to New Zealand. Also included are a short essay on the work of GRUs in the Middle East and Africa, possibly written by him for the NZEF Times, a free newspaper produced for Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) personnel, a series of excerpts from his official Unit War Diary, and an unattributed and undated protocol, apparently issued to him as Officer in Command of the NZGREU, outlining the duties of a GRU. Collectively, these forgotten and till now unstudied documents provide a unique insight into both the role of, and everyday life in, a GRU during and immediately after the campaign, revealing to us their attendant routines, frustrations, dangers, stresses and—at times—horror. In this way they add significantly to our knowledge and understanding of the campaign, and also of these essential, but lesser-known units.

#### *Walter Eric von Schramm*

When Lieutenant Walter (Wally) von Schramm was transferred to the NZGREU in September 1941 he was 33 (**Figure 2**). He was

old for a Lieutenant, married, a practicing Christian, an amateur photographer, highly practical, trained in hygiene and sanitation and an experienced and conscientious army administrator. There is no evidence to suggest that he had actually been groomed for his new role but in selecting him for it, someone had chosen very carefully.



Figure 2

Wally at the “Maadi Hut” (photo: unknown)

Born in 1908, the only son of Albert and Laura von Schramm of Henderson, Auckland, Wally was of German decent, his Grandfather Pastor Max von Schramm, a Silesian-German immigrant to Australia.<sup>1</sup> Wally grew up in the Lincoln Road area of Henderson,<sup>2</sup> now a suburb of Auckland, but at that time a separate rural community known for its orchards.<sup>3</sup> His father was the manager of “The Garth” fruit farm on which the family lived,<sup>4</sup> and both his parents were active members of the local community.<sup>5</sup> His sister Dorothy (Doy), two years his junior, contracted polio in childhood and was permanently

disabled.<sup>6</sup> Since Wally was not himself a German speaker,<sup>7</sup> at home, it can be assumed that the family spoke in English. Otherwise little can now be reconstructed of his youth. We know nothing of his primary education, we do not know what his interests were, and we do not know who or what his friends were. We do know, however, that he was sufficiently bright to gain entry in 1923 to Auckland's recently opened Mount Albert Grammar School, where during his first year he achieved "satisfactory" results (Figure 3), and that in later years, it mattered to him greatly that he was an Old Albertian.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his adult life, Wally was a "joiner", volunteering and sitting on committees, and from early on, he was attracted to army life and administration. At Mount Albert, he joined the school army cadets.<sup>9</sup> From 1926 to 1940, he served with the North Auckland

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<sup>1</sup> The link between Wally and Pastor von Schramm is established by a death notice published in the New Zealand Herald for Kate von Schramm of Doncaster, Victoria, describing her as the Pastor's widow and Albert's mother (New Zealand Herald, 1928, 1 July, p. 1)

<sup>2</sup> Wally's childhood address is recorded on his school record card (Figure 3)

<sup>3</sup> Flude, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Albert von Schramm is listed in the Auckland Directory for Henderson from 1924 to 1947 as the manager of "The Garth", and described as such in the New Zealand Herald (1926, 3 May, p. 14). Till 1942 at least, when the property was sold, the manager of "The Garth" was provided with a six room cottage on site (Auckland Star, 1942, 7 Aug., p. 2)

<sup>5</sup> Albert was an active member of the Auckland Citrus Growers Association and Laura president of the Henderson Croquet Club (Auckland Star, 1928, 18 May, p. 10; 1935, 8 Apr., p. 10). They were also involved with the Independent Order of Oddfellows (Burgess, 2024)

<sup>6</sup> Burgess, 2024

<sup>7</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>8</sup> Wally refers to it in his 1943 diary, and in his will, he left his books to the school (Will of Walter Eric von Schramm, 1971)

<sup>9</sup> Auckland War Memorial Museum (*hereafter* AWMM), n.d

<sup>10</sup> AWMM, n.d

<sup>11</sup> Wally was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in 1933 and Lieutenant in 1935 (Auckland Star, 1935, 12 Nov., p. 6; 1936, 21 Aug., p. 11; New Zealand Gazette, 1934, p. 962; 1936, p. 426)

**Mt. Albert Grammar School.**

RECORD OF *(Term) Schramm, Walter E.* *16. 4. 1908*  
CHRISTIAN NAME. DATE OF BIRTH.

Parent's Initials *Mr A. P. Schramm* *The Earth Lincoln Rd Henderson,*  
and Address *2*

*3*

Entr.	Qual.	Form.	Term.	Eng.	Hist.	Geog.	Lat.	Fr.	Comm.	Math.	Dr.	Sci.	Days Abs.	Late.	Det. Cards.	H.M. Report.	Class Honours.		
23	Latin III B		1	<i>A</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>V.S.</i>	<i>S.</i>		<i>S.</i>	<i>S.</i>	<i>S.</i>	-	-	-	<i>V. Good</i>			
			2	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>26</i>		<i>14</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>33</i>	-	-	-	<i>Good</i>	
			3	<i>14</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>30</i>		<i>18</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	-	-	-	<i>Very Good</i>	
24	I.V.C.		1				<i>4</i>			<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>		<i>9</i>	-	-		<i>Good</i>		
			2	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>13</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>21</i>		<i>14</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>21</i>		<i>0</i>	-		<i>Good</i>	
			3	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>		<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>		<i>17</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>12</i>		<i>2</i>	-		<i>Good</i>	
25	V.C.		1														<i>Very Good</i>		
			2	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>10</i>		<i>13</i>			<i>23</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>8</i>		<i>3</i>	-		<i>W.B.</i>	
			3	<i>21</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>14</i>		<i>15</i>			<i>28</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>24</i>		-	-		<i>Good</i>	
26	V.I.C.		1	<i>W.</i>		<i>S.</i>		<i>S.</i>		<i>F.</i>	<i>V.F.</i>	<i>S.</i>				<i>Fair</i>			
			2	<i>27</i>	<i>24</i>		<i>13</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>27</i>		<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>24</i>		<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>Very Good</i>	
			3	<i>28</i>	<i>27</i>		<i>16</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>25</i>		<i>27</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>		-	-		<i>Very Good</i>	
			1																
			2																
			3																
			1																
			2																
			3																

**Figure 3**  
Wally's 1923–26 school report card (scan: Greg Cave, Mount Albert Grammar School)

(Territorial) Regiment,<sup>10</sup> in which he rose to the rank of Lieutenant.<sup>11</sup> He also joined and became honorary treasurer of the local branch of the St Andrews Society,<sup>12</sup> a “Scottish” charitable organisation. Then in January 1940, an early volunteer, he transferred to the newly formed NZ 21st Battalion, 2NZEF (Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> At this time his civilian profession was listed as “farmer”.<sup>14</sup> Two months later, before heading off to the war, he married Eva Roberts, a neighbour from Henderson and his fiancée of two years.<sup>15</sup>

In his early personal diary, Wally comes over as conservative and practical, with an almost child-like enthusiasm for the mechanical, but unworldly and frustratingly unreflective. A typical earlier 20th-century New Zealander perhaps? But Wally’s war was far from typical.





**Figure 4**

Wally (circled) in the NZ 21st Battalion (photo: Cody, 1953)

Though trained as an infantryman he never saw action himself. Transferred from the NZ 21st to the NZ 18th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcements, he was in the part of the 2NZEF diverted to the UK when Germany invaded France and the Low Countries in May 1940.<sup>16</sup> Of his life and responsibilities in the UK, we know that the New Zealand forces posted there spent most of their time training, that he was stationed first at Dogmersfield Camp, Hampshire,<sup>17</sup> and then at Eashing Park, Surrey (in a now destroyed country house), and that on the eve of his departure for Egypt, when his diaries begin, he was acting Officer in Command of D Company, NZ 29th Battalion, a short-lived scratch formation put together in the UK from various reinforcement companies.<sup>18</sup>

During his first few months in Egypt (March–September 1941), Wally worked as an administrator with the NZ 31st (Training)

<sup>12</sup> Auckland Star, 1935, 8 July, p. 10

<sup>13</sup> Cody, 1953, pl. op. p. 50; von Schramm, 1946a

<sup>14</sup> Nominal Role, 1941, p. 191

<sup>15</sup> New Zealand Herald, 1937, 24 Dec., p. 18; 1940, 16 March, p. 1

<sup>16</sup> Cody, 1953, p. 10; Hargest, 1946, p. 11

<sup>17</sup> Information from a WW2 clothing label of Wally's now in the AWMM. Dogmersfield Camp was somewhere near Crookham

<sup>18</sup> Cody, 1953, pp. 16–21; von Schramm, 1941

Battalion, stationed at Maadi Camp, to the south of Cairo. He was also elected to and worked conscientiously for the Mess Committee. Life was easy, regimented and boring.

Then in September 1941, he was transferred to the NZGREU and his day-to-day life took an extraordinary turn. He was charged with responsibility for things, sometimes dangerous, sometimes disturbing things, which changed the nature of his war utterly. Wally von Schramm became tallyman for the dead of the North African campaign. For month after month, he and his unit criss-crossed the desert, from body to body, from cemetery to cemetery, from grave to grave (**Figures 5–6**). Like other soldiers,<sup>19</sup> they also scoured it for booty, including military souvenirs (**Figure 7**), of which he was an avid collector.<sup>20</sup> On other days, and at night, he banged away on his typewriter, compiling endless burial returns. Someone in the unit owned a wind-up gramophone, itself possibly booty, on which dance and classical music was played for relaxation, and sometimes, under



**Figure 5**

Isolated UK or Dominion Forces graves in the desert (photo: Oliver Conoley)



**Figure 6**

Small allied cemetery, one of several near the beach at Sollum (photo: Lloyd Rodgers)

the spectacular night sky, he felt his perspective displaced from the everyday to the spiritual,<sup>21</sup> an experience common to many travellers in the desert.

The job was arduous and the emotional stress, to which he later admitted, considerable.<sup>22</sup> “Can I stick it?” he wrote in his diary after one awful, body-ridden day: “I must” (**Figure 16**). And stick it he did. He remained with the unit for over a year and a half and was its Officer in Command for over a year, until his relief and repatriation to New Zealand with the 2NZEF’s first furlough draft in mid 1943.

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Douglas, 1946 [1966]; Roach, 1982

<sup>20</sup> Maxwell, 1978. Wally gave most of his German souvenirs to his friend Dal McGuirk. Other objects from his collection are in the AWMM

<sup>21</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>22</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.



**Figure 7**

One of Wally's souvenirs. An officers' continental *Luftwaffe* eagle picked up in Egypt somewhere to the west of El Alamein (photo: MST)

In Cairo meanwhile, he took in the sights like any tourist, shopped, went to the cinema—lazy habits acquired while he was an administrator stationed at Maadi Camp. His default accommodation was the New Zealand Forces Club on Sharia Malik Farida. He quickly learned the word “Wog”, but never how to spell it. (Relaxation remained the no less problematical “Maori PT”). Slowly he acquired Egyptian friends, but these mostly Jewish and Armenian. Endlessly, and everywhere, he wrote letters to Eva, his beloved “Curley Top”, and to other friends and relations,<sup>23</sup> impatiently awaiting the return post. *Zibib* (Egyptian raki) was interesting and Turkish coffee good, but rare Toheroa Soup<sup>24</sup> and New Zealand mutton remained especially welcome treats.

What affect his service in the desert and Cairo had on him we cannot of course know, maybe he was traumatised, maybe institutionalised, maybe he was sufficiently unreflective to take all he experienced in his stride, but by 1946, after a brief spell back in Henderson—when army records once again list him as a “farmer”—and in the North Auckland Regiment,<sup>25</sup> he was divorced from “Curley

Top”<sup>26</sup> and on the Head Quarters staff of the NZ 2nd Divisional Cavalry Regiment, having volunteered for J-Force, the New Zealand contingent of British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan.<sup>27</sup> Something had gone badly wrong for Wally von Schramm and it is hard to believe that it was not in some way to do with his war.<sup>28</sup>

For his time in Japan, evidence is once again sparse, and ambiguous. The only job we know he had was Officer in Command at the BCOF Holiday Hostels in Beppu, Kyushu (a leave centre for UK and Dominion troops), extant Standing Orders under his name<sup>29</sup> indicating that he was in command of all BCOF hostels there, and a later newspaper report by the Official New Zealand Correspondent with J-Force placing him in charge of a single hostel only.<sup>30</sup>

On his return from Japan, Wally was posted to the Auckland Regiment (the Countess of Ranfurley’s Own), finally retiring from the army in 1950,<sup>31</sup> but he kept in touch with it via the 21st Battalion Association of which he was a founding member and later President. He worked as an engineer for the Auckland Transport Board at the Epsom Tram Depot, where he kept notes on every tram he worked on.<sup>32</sup> Clearly his enthusiasm for the mechanical did not fade. Subsequently he worked for Auckland’s Chairs and Frames Ltd, C.L. Stevenson Ltd, a wholesale toy merchant (1966–67), and a

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<sup>23</sup> No surviving personal letters to or from Wally are known

<sup>24</sup> A popular New Zealand canned soup. The Toheroa is a large clam, commercial harvesting of which was banned long-ago owing to its over exploitation

<sup>25</sup> New Zealand Gazette, 1943, p. 1530; Nominal Roll, 1950, p.137

<sup>26</sup> New Zealand Herald, 1944, 22 June, p. 7; 1944, 7 September, p. 7

<sup>27</sup> Wally was re-mobilised on the 29th of March 1946 and posted to J-Force two months later (Dittmer, 1946; New Zealand Gazette, 1946, p. 839; Schramm, 1946a)

<sup>28</sup> cf. Parr, 2012, p. 12

<sup>29</sup> Schramm, 1946b; 1947

<sup>30</sup> Evening Star, 1947, 4 March, p. 5

<sup>31</sup> 6th of October 1950 (New Zealand Gazette, 1950, p. 1981)

<sup>32</sup> AWMM, n.d

<sup>33</sup> AWMM, n.d

lawnmower repair shop.<sup>33</sup> He also retained an interest in a small fruit farm, which he kept till his retirement.<sup>34</sup>

In 1950, he met Beate von Schramm, a German relative and new immigrant to New Zealand nearly 20 years his junior,<sup>35</sup> marrying her soon after.<sup>36</sup> Within a few years, however, she deserted him, and returned to Europe.<sup>37</sup> Wally married for the third and last time, probably around 1970/71,<sup>38</sup> this time to an older woman, Pat Brooking (nee Lynch), the widow of Sam Brooking, a New Zealand friend/correspondent of Wally's referred to in the first of his diaries. Pat stayed with Wally till his death from cancer in 1980.<sup>39</sup> But when Pat died in 1993, her remains were interred, not with his, but with those of Sam Brooking and under the name Patricia Lynch Brooking.<sup>40</sup> Thus in death Wally was deserted again.

WW2 historian and *Afrikakorps* collector, Dal McGuirk, who got to know Wally through the 21st Battalion Association, and to whom Wally gave the personal diaries transcribed here, remembers him as a popular figure who worked hard for the Association's members. "He had a ready smile," he remembers "I liked Wally very much, a very decent human being" (**Figure 8**).<sup>41</sup> He was flawed of course. He had two failed marriages. His need to be an insider was surely a weakness, not a strength. To some, his interest in committees, collecting and machines will seem nerdy. Contradictions in the diaries hint at an occasional economy with the truth. And ultimately, his

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<sup>34</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>35</sup> Wanganui Chronicle, 1950, 3 June, p. 9

<sup>36</sup> There are no accessible records for this marriage, but for her 1951 naturalisation, Beate is described as von Schramm, Beate, Anna, Gertrud (Mrs) (Archives New Zealand, n.d)

<sup>37</sup> New Zealand Truth, 1961, 17 Oct.

Beate is on the passenger list of the SS Fairsea, departing Auckland on the 17th of January 1958, for Southampton (UK), her destination listed as Southampton

<sup>38</sup> This date is inferred from Wally's 1971 will, in which he left his property to her (Will of Walter Eric von Schramm, 1971)

<sup>39</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>40</sup> Auckland Council, 2023a; 2023b; Find a Grave, 2023

<sup>41</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.





**Figure 8**  
Wally in 1980 (photo: Dal McGuirk)

professional trajectory was not perhaps a successful one for an Old Albertian. But he worked hard, was conscientious, steadfast and, as McGuirk says, decent, qualities which are both admirable and well-suited him to his very difficult role with the NZGREU (Figure 9).



Figure 9

Wally's medals (photo: AWMM)

### *The Nature of the Diaries*

Is the story that Wally's diary tells us true, objective, complete? Is it false, subjective, abridged? Is what is written clear or unintelligible? Diaries and other personal narratives are written as a means of catharsis, out of habit (an everyday practice), in order to work through ideas, as an escape, as mnemonics, for posterity and/or for another person etc.,<sup>42</sup> and they are written under a range of very different conditions. Because of this, they vary in the foregoing respects, and so therefore does their value to the researcher.

We do not know why Wally wrote his personal diary. He did not tell us. But there are clues to his motivation in the text, and we can infer something of it from a comparison between it and his official Unit War Diary, which was written for institutional consumption. Blunt in its references to the dead and crowded with abbreviations,



many of which would have been unintelligible to anyone but a service insider, its tone is similar to that of his official diary, and it seems unlikely that it was intended for a posterity of civilian readers, and impossible that it was intended for his then wife. For a war diary, it is unreflective,<sup>43</sup> and cannot therefore have been written as a means of catharsis or in order to work through ideas. It is also often maddeningly perfunctory, filled-out with things most of us would think of as irrelevant—“*Left films for D & P* [developing and printing]”, “*Committee Work*”, “*Just Repetition of Previous Days Routine*” etc., while leaving out things important enough for inclusion in both the diaries of others and his Unit War Diary. It was not therefore much of a mnemonic.

Essentially, it is an abridgement of the Unit War Diary, topped and tailed by his service before and after the GRU and with personal additions, written less out of habit as out of a sense of personal responsibility. He set out to write it every day and he did so almost every day.

While sometimes perfunctory, therefore, and not always intelligible, his diaries do not share the flaws of many personal narratives.<sup>44</sup> They are not self-indulgent (except where his “beloved” Eva was concerned). They do not waste our time with unformed ideas and speculations. They are not fanciful and—above all—they do not routinely embellish the truth. This unembellished truth links the reader directly to the past, and, irrespective of their shortcomings, makes the diaries a very valuable resource indeed.

### *The Importance of the Diaries*

All such personal accounts comprise what would now be called “life writing” or “life narrative”.<sup>45</sup> Written at the time and in the places

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<sup>42</sup> e.g. Lejeune, 2009, pp. 31, 34

<sup>43</sup> cf. Crimp, 1971; McLean, 2016

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 10

<sup>45</sup> Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 193

where the events described in them took place, they document and are central to our understanding the so-called “People’s War”. Not only do they give us insight into war as it was actually experienced by those who participated in it, each of these texts, like the surviving material culture of the time, provide a potent psychological link to it. We realise and confront the reality of war through them.<sup>46</sup> For those of us with an interest in the individual, it does not matter if, like Wally’s diary, what survives of them is perfunctory or self-edited, on the contrary, for such editorials are themselves integral to understanding the individual.<sup>47</sup> Besides, what else survives of these extraordinary personal experiences? In most cases little but a few fading relics and a few fading memories. Except for the written word and a few rare interviews, for World War II, personal experience is now at the threshold of oblivion.

Because GRUs are so little known, Wally’s personal knowledge of them is of course of special interest. But other themes emerge and develop through the diaries, relating to the Western Desert campaign’s cultural/political, environmental, logistical and personal context, which contribute to our understanding both of his war and the war in the region generally.

In the diaries, it is hard to see the independent, neutral and—above all—Muslim country that Egypt in theory was. Rather it comes over as occupied, and not just by allied troops, but by Western culture (manifest in its architecture, churches, cinema and Downtown clubs) and the attitude of the occupying forces to the native Egyptian and *his* culture. For Wally, Egypt was the “Mousky” (Mouski) Bazaar, the sights, his Jewish and Armenian friends, and the desert. Is it any wonder, therefore, that his cultural orientation remained that of an earlier 20th-century New Zealander, and that when the time came, he couldn’t wait to go home; and is it any wonder that just a few years later, in an irredeemable act of cultural vandalism, Egyptian

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<sup>46</sup> Seager Thomas, 2023, p. 2

<sup>47</sup> cf. Seager Thomas, 2020, p. 19

nationalists in Cairo burned it all,<sup>48</sup> leaving the exotic but decaying shell that for years afterwards characterised Egypt for the Western visitor?



**Figure 10**

Qaret el Himeimat (photo: Walter von Schramm)

The diaries refer again and again to the hardships of the desert—the heat, the cold, the rain, the dust and the insects. Photographs attributed<sup>49</sup> to Wally in his surviving photograph collection include scenes (**Figures 10** and **66**), which recall the beauty of the desert as conveyed by writers such as T.E. Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger, but that is emphatically not the picture Wally paints of it in his diary, which reveals it to be an unforgiving place that made life generally, his job and the war difficult. The narrative

<sup>48</sup> Cooper, 1989, pp. 330–36

<sup>49</sup> See my note on intellectual property, p. 51, below

thus provides a cautionary tale for those of us who, in studying and reconstructing aspects of the campaign there, would be carried away by the romance of the desert.<sup>50</sup>

They also provide a fresh glimpse into everyday life behind the front. Some of what Wally says is familiar of course. There are books about Maadi Camp, where the New Zealanders were based.<sup>51</sup> We know about Cairo social life and Ash Wednesday, when the city was panicked by the close advance of Rommel's forces to the city.<sup>52</sup> We know, too, about the sheer weight of matériel available to the allies at different periods during the campaign, powerfully depicted in several places through the diaries. Less familiar is his depiction of the ponderousness of army administration in Cairo, the apparently time-wasting comings-and-goings, and the detailed and complicated logistical network behind the front and the intimacy of the junior officer working there with this. Overall, the impression given of concurrent efficiency and inefficiency adds in no small way to our understanding the otherwise inexplicable performance of what were extensive, often brave, and well-equipped UK and Dominion forces in the theatre.

### *Graves Registration and Enquiries Units (GRUs) in the Western Desert*

World War II UK and Dominion forces Graves Registration and Enquiries Units, later Graves Registration Units,<sup>53</sup> played a central role in the curation of the dead during that conflict and yet are only

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<sup>50</sup> cf. Crimp, 1974, pp. 24, 88–89, 95; Douglas, 1946 [1966], pp. 103–04; Worthington, 1943, p. 5

<sup>51</sup> e.g. Hedley, 2009

<sup>52</sup> e.g. Cooper, 1989

<sup>53</sup> The official designation of these units changed from Graves Registration and Enquiries (or Enquiry) Units, to Graves Registration Units in January 1944, but both the name Graves Registration Unit and the abbreviation GRU were used widely prior to this date (Spark, 2009, p. 54, note 45)

<sup>54</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], pp. 177–78

<sup>55</sup> Grey, 2016; Spark, 2009

little known. There is a short account of them in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) history<sup>54</sup> and two PhD theses, which provide useful overviews.<sup>55</sup> Also useful are a collection of Unit War Diaries produced by Australian GRUs recently posted online by the Australian War Memorial,<sup>56</sup> and a series of letters in the online archives of the CWGC.<sup>57</sup> But despite the huge number of dead that passed through their hands—in many cases literally—they remain largely absent from accounts of that war. Look up “Graves Registration” online and you will find a few references to their work during the WWI, numerous references to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and to the United States Quartermaster’s Graves Registration Service, but, except for those listed above, hardly any to the work by UK and Dominion GRUs during WW2 and none at all on their work in the Western Desert, the subject of the present volume.

There are obvious reasons for this. The first is that UK and Dominion GRUs were small and, in the Western Desert at least, few in number. The second is that they were unglamorous and worked behind the scenes. These two reasons by themselves were probably enough to ensure a degree of obscurity. The third is the very high profile of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, a fact acknowledged as early as July 1944 in a self-defensive letter to the War Office from Fabian Ware, the deputy director of the then Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC).<sup>58</sup> It has simply been assumed that the Commission was responsible for the curation of the dead,<sup>59</sup> an assumption realised in fact in the overlap between Commission and senior UK and Dominion Graves Registration personnel.<sup>60</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> e.g. I Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit (1942)

<sup>57</sup> CWGC, n.d [1943]; n.d [1944]

<sup>58</sup> Ware, 1944. The name of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was changed to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in 1960 (Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 222

<sup>59</sup> Spark, 2009, p. 2; e.g. VDK, 2003

<sup>60</sup> e.g. Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 177. In the Middle East, Herbert Hart, R.H. Hoffman, Andrew Menzies, George Peek

last reason is difficult to establish with certainty but is the most compelling of the four, and that is that out of squeamishness or sensitivity the establishment of the day deliberately withheld from the public full cognisance of what happened to their dead: that many were left unburied out in the desert for months, that records were jumbled, that they were dug up for identification then reburied, and then dug up *again* and concentrated—sometimes more than once—for both practical financial, and political reasons.<sup>61</sup> To achieve this GRUs were first isolated from the public<sup>62</sup> and then quietly forgotten. No MBEs were awarded to unit personnel and no unit histories written...

The protocols surrounding the treatment and burial of the dead during World War II developed out of the combatants' experience during WWI and the provisions of the 1929 Geneva Convention, and for the UK and its Dominion allies, crystallised in the UK War



Figure 11

(?) New Zealand burial party in the desert (photo: unknown)





**Figure 12**

Burying German dead at Fuka (photo: Walter von Schramm)

Office's Field Service Regulations<sup>63</sup> and in the IWGC. There were four stages—battlefield burial, to be carried out by members of the units to which the dead belonged (**Figure 11**), or, in the event that the war had moved on, by whoever came next (**Figure 12**); oversight (registration, mapping, curation etc.) to be carried out by GRUs (comprising personnel considered surplus to requirements or unfit for battle) (**Figure 57**); concentration, intended to make the curation of graves viable over time, begun by the GRUs, continued by Graves Concentration Units (GCUs) (**Figure 13**), and completed by the War Graves Commission; and final memorialisation/monumentalisation carried out by the Commission (**Figures 73 and 77–79**). A thorough

<sup>61</sup> Hoffman, 1943; this volume, p. 315

<sup>62</sup> War Office, 1939, p. 119; Appx I

<sup>63</sup> War Office, 1924, pp. 253–65; 1939, pp. 115–119, 191

record of all stages was *supposed* to be made but in practice of course this did not always happen.<sup>64</sup> The particular role of the GRU in this sequence was to locate or re-locate existing battlefield burials, to ensure the correct identification of the dead within these (which frequently involved exhuming them), and to record these. Where the dead had been bypassed and lay unburied, and—sometimes—when they died in a GRU's area of operations, they were also tasked with burying these (**Figure 12**). Finally, when the location of concentration cemeteries had been fixed upon, they participated in the concentrations.



**Figure 13**

El Alamein Concentration Cemetery (photo: Walter von Schramm)

According to Wally, for the Middle East, GRUs were drawn from Australian, Indian, New Zealand, Polish, South African, UK and US forces,<sup>65</sup> though *as far as can be ascertained*, only units from the UK, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia operated in the Western Desert.<sup>66</sup> These latter were under a single command, Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Forces (GREMEF or GRE for short), based in Cairo, and their nominal establishment, role and procedures were the same.<sup>67</sup> Each was allotted an area or succession of areas and within these was responsible for overseeing the recording and curation of all the dead—allied/axis, army/air force, UK/Dominion/other allied—though it is clear that units were deployed on missions of purely national interest as well.<sup>68</sup>



The establishment of the GRU comprised 13 men, a Captain, two Lieutenants and 10 Other Ranks, including a clerk, a photographer and a draughtsman (all NCOs), three batman-drivers, a cook and three others.<sup>69</sup> It could additionally call on the Royal Engineers for survey and construction work (the RE was also responsible for the supply of temporary grave markers), locals and personnel from fighting units as guides, and the Pioneer Corps, local labour (**Figure 13**, far left) and POWs for grave digging. Supplied with three trucks, the implication was that each would be deployed in three teams.

As far as it can be reconstructed, the procedure for dealing with graves and the dead in the field was as follows.<sup>70</sup> A team would be armed by GREMEF with grid references of known cemeteries and burials and set off to find these, or, alternatively, it would scour the battlefield by map grid square for unburied bodies and unregistered and lost graves. Unidentified bodies would be identified using dog tags, pay books, and any other identifiers found with them. If these were absent or not readable, any information which might aid their future identification, such as regimental badges, location and other potentially interpretable contextual information was collected or recorded. Where a body was well-preserved, a photograph of it was also sometimes taken.<sup>71</sup> The body was then buried or re-buried where it had been found, or else in a nearby cemetery, and a Burial Return—for allied and axis personnel alike, Army Form W3314—filled out, which detailed the dead person's service number, name, rank and unit, how the body had been identified, the location of the grave, etc. (**Figure 14**). Also completed were a Graves Registration

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<sup>64</sup> e.g. Huntingdon, 1944; Spark, 2009, p. 67–68

<sup>65</sup> Appx I

<sup>66</sup> Spark, 2009, pp. 64, 72, n. 121

<sup>67</sup> Spark, 2009, pp. 63–64; Appxs I and 2

<sup>68</sup> e.g. I Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit, 1942, p. 211–212

<sup>69</sup> Spark, 2009, p. 62; Appxs I and 2

<sup>70</sup> Appxs I and 2

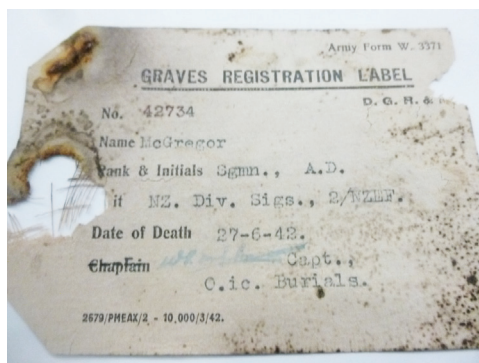
<sup>71</sup> Appx I



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already been recorded and any work that was needed on them was noted, cemeteries were tidied, graves were mounded up, markers erected or replaced, sketch plans drawn, photographs (which might ultimately be sent to the family) taken, and signs with the cemeteries' names set up. Back at base, the forms completed were duplicated for dispersal to a variety of interested commands, a card index compiled and a collective Graves Registration Report—Army Form W3372—filled out.<sup>73</sup> Indeed a great deal of time was spent at base on administration, lobbying, maintenance, logistics, preparing grave

**Figure 15**  
Sample Graves Registration  
Label (AF W3317) completed  
by Wally (photo: Dal  
McGuirk)



markers and various other day to day tasks necessary to keep a GRU running in the field.

Of course not everything went smoothly and by April 1944, six GRU personnel had (or are reported to have) died in the Western Desert.<sup>74</sup> The desert is huge and thorough survey of it by the few people comprising the GRUs was always an impossibility and many bodies and graves, as well as the identities of bodies and remains that had previously been recorded, were lost for good. For example, at El Alamein, the Alamein Memorial commemorates over 8500 UK and Dominion soldiers who died during the North African campaign

<sup>72</sup> War Office, 1939, p. 116

<sup>73</sup> Appx 3

<sup>74</sup> Dilke, 1944, p. 748

Army Form W.3190.  
(Rev. 1/41)

**Personal Effects Certificate**

THIS PORTION FOR USE AT THE BATTLE ONLY.

Inventory No. \_\_\_\_\_

Rank, Name & Initials Sgt. McGregor  
A.D.  
Regt. of Corps NZ. Div. Sigs. 2/NZEF.

Nat. & Casualty B/C.

Date of 27/6/42

I CERTIFY that I have examined all the personal belongings of the above-mentioned, and that, to the best of my belief, he had no other personal effects.

WHEN FOUND.

The effects or identified on the back here of, which were packed under the personal supervision of an officer, are all that were recovered.

Signature W. J. McQuirk

Rank pt., O.C.,

Unit GRU.

Date 27/6/42

\*5211. W.L.3

2,500 bks. 11/41. W & L.P. Gp. 656.

**Registered Post Particulars**

**Special Instructions**

Personal effects of—

(i) Deceased or Missing officers and other ranks will always be dispatched by registered post to G.H.Q. 1st and Echelon.

(ii) Sick or Wounded officers and other ranks will always be dispatched by registered post to the hospital to which admitted, if known, otherwise to G.H.Q. 1st and Echelon.

Two copies of this Army Form will be enclosed in the parcel.

This Army Form will also be used when forwarding the personal effects of enemy dead or enemy prisoners of war.

Figure 16

Sample Personal Effects Certificate (AF W3190) completed by Wally (photo: Dal McGuirk)

who have no known grave, while the cemetery itself contains 814 unidentified burials.<sup>75</sup> The desert is also a unforgiving environment and much work done by GRUs was undone by it and had to be redone. Inevitably, too, GRUs and GRU personnel were of uneven quality.<sup>76</sup> For a range of reasons, logistical, human and environmental, therefore, units and visitors with an interest in the region's dead had cause to complain about what they found there.<sup>77</sup> In the end, however, in spite of everything, thousands of dead soldiers were successfully curated there, and much of the credit for this goes to the GRUs.

### *Issues with the Diaries*

In his personal diaries, Wally wrote mostly in long-hand using a fountain pen. His writing is small but, once the reader has got used to his writing style, is in most entries perfectly readable (**Figure 17**). His Unit War Diary is also partly in long-hand. The writing is bigger but the carbon-copy we have of it is blurred, and deciphering it is more of a struggle, but it too is readable (**Figure 18**). The problem with the diaries is not with the writing, but what is written: his spelling, his abbreviations and his use of words.

Wally, despite having being a Grammar School boy, could not spell. He could not spell the names of senior officers. Macky, for a while his own Commanding Officer, is spelt Mackay. He could not spell the names of his friends. McClure, for example, is spelt McLure. He could not spell everyday words. Throughout the diaries, “across” is spelt “accross”. “Defence” is spelt the American way; “dysentery” is “dysentry”; and “Wog”, “Waugh”. He is better with geographical names but even these he sometimes gets wrong. For example, a New Zealand base in Greece, “Arrisé”, is presumably Larissa, while “Amriya”, an allied base outside Alexandria, is presumably Amiriya. Apart from interrupting the flow of the text, these errors can be bewildering, and make unclear and therefore uninterpretable what might otherwise have been useful text.<sup>78</sup>

His use of military abbreviations present similar problems. A complacent army insider, his texts are littered with these, in varying forms, including some, the meanings of which are not now known.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> CWGC, 2023

<sup>76</sup> Spark, 2009, p. 77. In his personal diary, Wally implicitly criticises members both of his unit and others, while a Graves Concentration Report for Halfaya-Sollum Cemetery, explicitly criticises the work of the NZGREU, specifically that of Wally's colleague Lieutenant Hutchinson (Thomas, 1944)

<sup>77</sup> e.g. Spark, 2009, p. 94

<sup>78</sup> For this volume, I have regularised Wally's punctuation, corrected his English spelling, or—in cases where this does not interrupt the flow of the text—followed it with “[sic]”. In-text alternative spellings for personal, geographical and other names are also in square brackets



FEBRUARY 1943

Friday 26

Back to Desi Umm Khawabir.

Found a great number of bodies  
& remnants of bodies. God, what  
a shambles. Our lads killed  
last June in retreat. Thus when  
the Kiwis counter attacked.  
Jory paid for his cheek, here &  
out cost was heavy.

The futility of it all.

Oh! when will it all end?

How Homesick I have been of late.

This job is getting me down after  
18 months. Can I stick it?

I must. My eyes are going  
with the night work.

Figure 17

Page from Wally's personal diary for the 26th February, 1943. Scale 150%  
(scan: MST)

Regarding War Diaries and Intelligence  
 are contained in F.S. Regs., Vol. I  
 & Staff Manual respectively. This page  
 prepared in accordance with  
 both and Year. JUNE 1942

**WAR DIARY**  
 Vol. 10  
**INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY**  
 (When heading not required)

U.S. GRAVES  
 Unit: 2nd Army  
 Commanding Officer: W.E. Schumann

Army Form C. 2318

Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices
2	(1-10)	Very heavy air raids on Salerno & Halfway Areas during night. Large fires started in Salerno Area at 2350 hrs. - Burning for more than 2 hrs.	WE on Schumann
3		Lt. King to C.C.S. to have ambulance dressed. Lt. Hutchinson to Half Way Horse Area. Self to Hig Tree Wells Cemetery site & to 30 S.A.E.C. workshops. To New Caprija Cemetery & F.P.O. More continuous air raids all night. Much bombing in Halfway Area.	WE on Sch
4		Lt. Hutchinson in camp - office work. One trench being serviced. Lt. King to Bardia Area & Campo Romano to bury burnt bodies of German dead. (2). Self to Hadfield's Dress Hospital & to 2nd Army C.C.S. & Burial Returns. To Fort Caprija new Cemetery. - Raaf & A.P.O. On truck to	WE and

1253 W. 2305/1940. 1.000A 12/50-MCA Collid-51-2212 Form C2318/122

Figure 18

Page from Wally's official unit War Diary for the 2nd–4th of June, 1942  
 (photo: Dal McGuirk)

As for Wally's use of words, these included a number of terms current in the 1940s that many of us would not now use—"Coon", "Froggies", "Hun" and "Vaugh". It is impossible to know of course whether he intended these words to be derogatory, or not. I think he did not. Having got to know him through the diaries, I think his use of them was analogous to his use of abbreviations discussed above. But to many, such subtleties do not matter. Irrespective of context and intended meaning, they are derogatory, and should not have been and should not now be used. This emphatically is not my view, and I have therefore retained (and repeated) the words in question, but in acknowledgement of the issues surrounding them,

<sup>79</sup> In order to make the diary text easily searchable digitally, I have standardised the abbreviations used, and in cases where their meaning is not obvious, either expanded them in the text (again in square brackets) or explained them in footnotes

and their potential to distress and offend, have prefaced this volume as a whole with a “health warning” heralding their presence (and that of some other potentially distressing and offensive material).

### *The Appendices*

Appendices 1 and 2 consist of transcriptions of lengthy documents relevant to our understanding of Wally's war and the NZGREU. Neither has a named author, but it is assumed that the first was written by Wally himself, and the second by HQ Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Forces (GREMEF). Other surviving documents cover similar ground<sup>80</sup> but none of them so thoroughly, relevantly or systematically. There are, however, problems with both.

Appendix 1, probably written by Wally for publication in the NZEF Times, includes both errors and probable falsehoods, which throw its overall reliability into in doubt. These include a statement that all allied GRUs, which operated in the Middle East and Africa—including Indian and US—were under a single command, which was not the case,<sup>81</sup> and a claim that a member of NZGREU was wounded by a booby trap attached to the body of a German soldier exhumed for identification. While booby-trapping of allied bodies by the Germans is attested, including during the North African campaign,<sup>82</sup> to treat their *own* dead in such a way would have been wholly inconsistent with their usual, very formal and respectful practice.<sup>83</sup> The incident moreover appears in neither Wally's personal diary, nor his Unit War Diary. Most likely, therefore, it is a concoction, inserted into the text for propaganda purposes, and rather than indicating that bodies were in fact booby-trapped, may well indicate the opposite.

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<sup>80</sup> e.g. DGRE, 1944

<sup>81</sup> Spark, 2009, pp. 64, 72, n. 121. Wally's authorship of the document and its destination are suggested by several misspellings characteristic of Wally's writing, such as “accross”, and his diary entries for the 12th and 17th of February, 1943, which refer to the NZEF Times and a write-up of the unit. Whether or not it was published is unknown

<sup>82</sup> e.g. Delaforce, 1996 [1999], p. 85; Dilke, 1944, p. 748; Jary, 1988, p. 83; Mataia, 2007, p. 82

<sup>83</sup> McGuirk, 1987, pp. 68–71



Appendix 2, derived from UK War Office regulations, and influenced by the IWGC, is addressed to the NZGREU, and suggests a close, cooperative relationship between these, but also, on the part of the NZGREU, a subordinate one, but because it unattributed, these relationships are not established with any certainty. In its details, it heralds a later (1944) document unambiguously attributed to the Army Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries.

Appendix 3 details the information to be recorded on a Graves Registration Form (Army Form W3372). Appendices 4 and 5 list identifiable NZGREU personnel, and known cemeteries within the unit's areas of operation, the first reconstructed from the diaries alone, the second from the diaries and extant Graves Concentration Report Forms.

### *Intellectual property*

While history belongs to us all, the raw material out of which it is fashioned often does not. The personal diaries transcribed here were given by Wally to his friend Dal McGuirk, who passed them to me. But I do not own their copyright—that belongs to Wally's heirs till midnight on the 31st December 2030, when (under New Zealand law) his copyright of life plus 50 years expires. Technically something similar would apply to Wally's photographs, and the other UK and Dominion Forces photographs used here. (For the German photographs, it would be 70 years). The difficulty is that we do not know, and cannot now know who took these photographs, and therefore to whom their copyright belonged, and what their status is now. Wally's own photographs, for example, include at least one in which he appears (**Figure 2**), so clearly he did not take it, while prints of another photograph reproduced here (**Figure 34**) are present in the photograph collections of at least four different New Zealand soldiers,<sup>84</sup> at least three of whom cannot have taken it. There is no record of it, but it seems likely that such photographs

---

<sup>84</sup> Edgar Collet, Alex Hedley (Sr), Henry Hill and anonymous (MST collection)

were printed in bulk and sold to allied soldiers as souvenirs, just as the German *Propaganda Kompanien* reproduced photographs of the war for sale to *Wehrmacht* troops.<sup>85</sup> Probably, therefore, they are out of copyright.

But what about those photographs of which we have no duplicates, in which the alleged photographer does not appear, and the history of which is at best anecdotal? What in fact of almost all of the photographs reproduced here? It is impossible to know for sure but in publishing this history, I may be breaching someone's copyright.

For these reasons, the present volume is being made available for free. I would note, moreover, that as current owner of the diaries, and most of the period photographs used to illustrate them, I control access to them. No claim can be made against me for *financial* loss resulting from breach of copyright, as I have not, and would not have made them available for commercial use. My use of them falls squarely within internationally acknowledged norms of "fair dealing" in non-commercial research. As for my own transcriptions, scans of photographs and editorial, I invoke the principal of "sweat of the brow". I read, interpreted and transcribed Wally's longhand, and the copyright of the present transcription therefore is in part my intellectual property; I restored, and/or manipulated the photographs and the copyrights of the resulting images of these are also in part mine. That said, provided that they are properly referenced to me and—where known—to their original creators, I grant permission to fellow scholars, enthusiasts and scholarly institutions to reproduce these modified works free of charge, wholly or in part, for non-commercial purposes.

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<sup>85</sup> Boll, 2003, pp. 167–70. Duplicated photos of the Western Desert and the Middle East occur in both UK and Dominion, and in German photograph albums. Some appear to be original prints or contact prints, others photographs of prints, and they include what look like amateur and what are certainly official photographs. Allied and German photographs, in the albums of UK and Dominion personnel, are often printed on Kodak Velox paper. German and Italian duplicates seen by me are mostly on Agfa paper



**Figure 19**

GRU grave marker for Australian Captain M.J. O'Mara (photo: unknown)



**Figure 20**

“Into the Blue”. Italian Fiat light tank abandoned in the desert (photo: unknown)

## DIARY 1941

*Lieut W.E. von Schramm*

22239

2nd NZEF

*NZ Graves Registration & Enquiry Unit*

### *From Godalming to Suez*

On the 3rd of January 1941, after six months stationed in the UK, Wally von Schramm embarked on HMT Duchess of Bedford (J24), part of the Bristol Channel contingent of Convoy WS5B for the Middle and Far East, via Freetown and the Cape. Sailing with him were troops of his own temporary Battalion, the NZ 29th, and the NZ 22nd and 23rd Battalions.

Wally's diary for this period describes the routines and occasional excitements of shipboard life, while introducing a number of personal themes, which reoccur through the diaries—an attentiveness to army rules and regulations; a belief in God and an active involvement with the church; an intolerance of the weather; a preoccupation with the mail; an interest in mechanical things. A 32-year old sharing a cabin with a group of younger officers to whom he was no doubt assigned as a steadying influence, he leaves us with an uncomfortable impression of someone who wanted to be, but was not, "one of the boys", and who turned instead for company to the ship's officers and the army's chaplains, who were older, while immersing himself in correspondence, the Duchess of Bedford's on-board routine and the minutiae of army life.

It also introduces us to his fellow 2NZEF soldiers. From Wally's original battalion, the NZ 21st, his friends John Stevenson and Carl Ferguson, captured in Greece and in Libya respectively,<sup>86</sup> and the peacetime journalist, Bill Butland, killed at El Alamein;<sup>87</sup> the Padres Hiddlestone and Hurst, captured in Crete, having stayed behind to assist with the wounded there;<sup>88</sup> Clifford Ironside of the NZ 23rd, a former Civil Servant, also killed at El Alamein;<sup>89</sup> and James Hargest, Commanding Officer of the 5th NZ Infantry Brigade,

captured during Operation Crusader and one of only two successful escapees from an Italian POW Camp prior to the armistice with Italy,<sup>90</sup> who was killed in Normandy, while bidding farewell to the British 50th Division to which he had been assigned as NZ observer.<sup>91</sup> With our benefit of hindsight, these mostly offhand entries are especially poignant.

Including a short stop at Cape Town to take on supplies and for rest and recreation, the journey to Egypt took two months. During this time, UK and Dominion Forces completed the conquest of Cyrenaica begun in December the previous year and newly promoted *Generalleutnant* Erwin Rommel arrived in Tripoli with the first elements of what was to become the *Afrikakorps*. The sea-sawing that was to characterise the Western Desert campaign had begun.

## JANUARY

### Wednesday 1st January

*1st Hogmanay away from New Zealand. Saw old year out and new year in, in mess at Eashing Park,<sup>92</sup> Godalming, Surrey. Bed at 0100 hrs. Bad night with flu and back. Up at 1000 hrs — Ill. Acting OC, D Coy. 99.99% of men suffering from effects of “Night Before”. Clearing Billets all day. CO Lecture in mess 1850 hrs. Down to “Stag” Inn<sup>93</sup> for an hour.*

---

<sup>86</sup> Lieutenant (later Captain) Ferguson and 2nd Lieutenant Stevenson. Like Wally, both had been posted to the NZ 18th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcements. Ferguson was captured at Sidi Rezegh (Cody, 1953, pp. 76–77, 133)

<sup>87</sup> Lieutenant (later Captain, MC) William Butland was killed on Miteiriya Ridge during the 2nd battle of El Alamein (Cody, 1953, p. 202)

<sup>88</sup> John Hiddlestone of the 5th Field Regiment NZ Artillery and William Hurst of the NZ 22nd Battalion (Glen, 1995, p. 256)

<sup>89</sup> Lieutenant (later Captain) Clifford Ironside of the NZ 23rd Battalion. Ironside was killed on Ruweisat Ridge during the 1st battle of El Alamein (Ross, 1959, p. 174)

<sup>90</sup> Hargest, 1946; Murphy, 1961, p. 340. The 5th NZ Infantry Brigade comprised the NZ 21st, 22nd and 23rd Battalions

<sup>91</sup> D'Este, 1994 [2001], p. 280

<sup>92</sup> A Palladian style country house built between 1729 and 1736, Eashing Park was requisitioned in 1940 and used first by the Highland Division and later Canadian and New Zealand troops. It was demolished in 1957

*Home at 2330 hrs.*

*Acting as Coy Commander.*

*Very cold.*

### **Thursday 2nd January**

*Freezing hard. Very biting wind. Up early. Troops evacuating quarters.*

*Packed all into my valise and suitcase. Sent them to train. Getting colder.*

*Light snow. Rum issue at 2200 hrs. Terribly Cold. Left Eashing Park at 2220 hrs and marched to Godalming Station with everything up. Arrived at 2300 hrs. Entrained 0015 hrs. Via Guildford [&] Reading, to Newport on Bristol Channel. What a boon that Rum was to us all, even non-drinkers.*

### **Friday 3rd January**

*Train alongside ship at 0830 hrs. Embarked on "Duchess of Bedford" (Figure 21) at 0900. More troops arriving all day. Ship is very crowded and will be more so when full. 23 Units to be on board. Busy day. Great food. Remained at berth tonight.*

*Air Raid warning at 2030 hrs.*

*Ship about 26,000 tons.<sup>94</sup>*

*Quiet night.*

*Sleeping in clothes.*

### **Saturday 4th January**

*22nd Bn embarked today with a lot of other Units. Now 23 different Units on this ship. All Rifles handed into Ship's Store. Very busy day.*

*Heavy AA Barrage from 1900 hrs. Still at berth at Newport.*

*Over 4000 All Ranks on the ship.*

*(J24.)*

---

<sup>93</sup> The Stag Inn in Lower Eashing still exists. Today it goes by the trendier name of the "Stag on the River"

<sup>94</sup> In fact, 20,448-tons. During her wartime service, HMT Duchess of Bedford, a former passenger liner with the Canadian Pacific Line, covered over 400,000 miles and carried 179,000 military personnel and was credited with the sinking of an unnamed U-boat. In 1948 she returned to civilian service as the Empress of France. She was scrapped in 1960 (Collinson, 2013)





**Figure 21**

The Duchess of Bedford on the Suez Canal in 1940 (photo: Geoffrey Keating)

### **Sunday 5th January**

*Fine, Foggy & Cold.*

*1st Practice "Boat Stations" at 0900 hrs. Ship left at 1100 hrs. Through locks at 1215 hrs.*

*Anchored at 1300 hrs.*

*Remained at anchor overnight.*

### **Monday 6th January**

*Still at Anchor.*

*Joined by Highland Princess.*

*Joined by Monarch of Bermuda.*

*Joined by Windsor Castle.*

*At Anchor overnight.*

---

Cabin 194. A Deck:



Lieut. W.E. von Schramm,  
2 Lts Stevenson, Ironside, Tyrrell, Morgan & Sandford.<sup>95</sup>

## **Tuesday 7th January**

*Joined by 2 more vessels.*

*Total of 4 troopships escorted by destroyer & Planes of Coastal Command started to steam north in Irish Channel at 0500 hrs. Cold & Foggy. Cleared during day. Muster stations at 1545 hrs. (12 knots). Convoy heading for Belfast in Line ahead at reduced speed as rest of convoy are late.*

## **Wednesday 8th January**

*Off Bangor at 0900 hrs.*

*Lying at anchor at Bangor, near Belfast, Northern Ireland. Convoy growing all the time. Lots of Balloon Barrage ships moored nearby.<sup>96</sup> Submarine cruising around Convoy. Yankee Destroyers at anchor. Weather Calm. Cold & misty.*

## **Thursday 9th January**

*Still at anchor at Bangor, in Northern Ireland, Belfast Lough. Convoy increasing Daily. Concert in After Men's mess.*

## **Friday 10th January**

*At anchor off Bangor in Belfast Lough, Northern Ireland. Paid men their first pay on HMT [His Majesty's Transport] "J24."*

*Ptes 10/—*

*WOs, Sgts £1—10—0*

*Officers £3—0—0*

*Pte Smith, J.C.R., very ill in Ward no 1, Ships hospital.*

---

<sup>95</sup> John Stevenson, Clifford Ironside (see notes 86 and 89) and Eric Tyrrell. Tyrrell, of the NZ 22nd Battalion, was captured in Greece (Baker, n.d, p. 97). Lieutenants Morgan and Sandford remain unidentified

<sup>96</sup> Barrage Balloon vessels were small vessels—tugs, barges, trawlers—from which barrage balloons were flown. The boats were crewed by the navy and the balloons flown and maintained by small, on-board contingents of RAF personnel

### **Saturday 11th January**

*Still at Anchor off Bangor. Remained in bed all day with mild touch of Flu & trouble with ear. (Same old story). Pte J.C.R., 18 Pln, very low. Not expected to live. Flu and septicaemia (from ingrown toenail). Very restless night due to heat. Heaven help us in tropics.*

### **Sunday 12th January**

Convoy sailed at 0500 hrs.

---

*Duchess of Richmond. Windsor Castle. Duchess of Bedford. Athlone Castle. Empress of Australia. Winchester Castle.  
Highland Princess. Laurentic.  
Monarch of Bermuda. Brittanica [Britannic].*

*Sailing North through North Channel. Ailsa Craig on Starboard Side.  
Convoy increased by large number of ships from Gourock [on the Clyde]. Coarse set slightly E of N. Calm Sea. Beautiful moonlight night [sic]. Convoy making very good speed.  
No disturbance during night.*

### **Monday 13th January**

*Blackout off: 1000 hrs.*

*Still sailing north. 21 ships in the Convoy, including Refugee Ships. Large escort. Destroyers. Cruisers. Battle Ship (Royal Sovereign Class). Sea getting up more and more as day passes. Absolutely no photography allowed on ships in Convoy. Severe Penalties. Speed of Convoy about 22 knots.*

*Lecture by Capt. White on Recce Bn organisation.*

*Full moon tonight — marvellous pictures as we rise & fall on the Heavy Seas.*

*Rain during night.*

---

*Blackout on: 1840 hrs.*

*Course changed to SW during morning. [Text in box.]*

**Tuesday 14th January**

*Blackout off: 1000 hrs. Course SW.*

*Very heavy sea running. Ship Rolling and pitching very much. Hate to be in any of the Destroyers in the submarine guard. They are all having a Hell of a time. Wonder how they keep going without capsizing. Muster Stations Parade. 1030 hrs to 1115 hrs (Light rain & very, very cold).*

---

*12 months ago, today, I entered Narrow Neck Camp<sup>97</sup> for Overseas Service. ANNIVERSARY.*

**Wednesday 15th January**

*Blackout off: 0939 hrs.*

---

*Course WSW. 14 knots. Sea moderating.*

*Two ships left convoy at 1130 hrs and went off without escort to Gibraltar.*

*9 Destroyers left and set off back. Ramillies still with us.<sup>98</sup>*

*31502. Soldier in 22nd Bn died today.*

*Clocks back 1 hour at midnight.*

**Thursday 16th January**

*Sea calm, but very long roll all day. Temperature rising steadily. Course still WSW. Funeral of 22nd Bn man at 1600 hrs. Our ship pulled out of convoy for half hour. Drums and Pipes played Lament. (Dead soldier was piper with 22 Bn).*

*Clocks back one hour at 2400 hrs.*

*Ship rolling steadily in beam sea.*

---

*Received uniform allowance to Dec. 31st*

*£3-6-8*

---

<sup>97</sup> Narrow Neck Camp was located in North Shore, Auckland. It was a training camp during both WWI and WW2

<sup>98</sup> HMS Ramillies, the "Royal Sovereign Class" battleship referred to in Wally's diary entry for the 13th January. Ramillies was launched in 1916 and remained in service throughout WW2. She was scrapped in 1948

[For the burial, Wally, as Second in Command of D Company, issued orders for a Special Muster Parade as follows:]

1. The funeral of 31507, Pte Colson [sic], J.H.P., will take place at Sea at 1600 hrs, today, 16-Jan-41.
2. ALL troops on J24 will be mustered at Boat Stations at 1540 hrs.
3. DRESS: Battle Dress.  
Caps, F.S. or Helmets, Steel.  
Life belts will be slung on shoulders.
4. The service will commence at 1553 hrs and the body will be committed to the deep at 1600 hrs.
5. Troops will be brought to attention at 1559 hrs.
6. The flag will be raised to the masthead at 1600 hrs.
7. Drums and Pipes on the Sun Deck will commence to play a Lament at 1600 hrs.
8. Troops will remain at attention during the playing of the Lament.
9. Troops will be dismissed at the conclusion of the Lament.

(Signed) W.E. Von Schramm, Lieut

From:- "D" Coy

2/i.c., "D" Coy

To: 16 Pln

29 Bn

17 Pln

18 Pln.

Ack.

16-Jan-41<sup>99</sup>

### Friday 17th January

Course WSW.

*Sea very rough and strong head wind. Passed to west of Azores during morning. Ship rolling & pitching very badly. Paid Company. 50% of Coy and all officers had 3rd Inoculation (TAB ½ PC) today.<sup>100</sup> One of other ships stopped to allow an operation to be performed on board. No hot water available for showering on ship. Sea increasing steadily all day.*

*Afraid a lot of lads will be dicky after their TAB.*

*Not so "hot" myself.*

### **Saturday 18th January**

*Course SW (10 points west of S).*

*Sea moderate. Speed 24 knots.*

*Routine work all day.*

*Men washing clothes. 1 Gal. [gallon] cold water for washing. 1 gallon cold — for rinsing. Water severely rationed.*

*No hot water available at any time.*

### **Sunday 19th January**

*Course SW.*

*Speed 14 knots.*

*Sea smooth. Weather fine & warm.*

*Emergency Muster Stations at 1345 hrs.*

*Had a look at the Gyro Compass (Brown) and Cinema Operating Room today. Very interested in whole works.*

*Beautiful day — weather fine & warm.*

*Finishing off mail for England & home.*

---

*Most welcome sight for our 7 months. Southern Cross appears in sky on Starboard bow.*

*Very clear.*

### **Monday 20th January**

*Course SW.*

*Convoy at point just north of Tropic at 1900 hrs. Sea calm. Temperature*

---

<sup>99</sup> Schramm, 1941. 31507 Private John Calson of the NZ 22nd Battalion was reported in the battalion's War Diary to have died of pneumonia on the 16th, not the 15th of January 1941, and to have been buried at sea (22nd Battalion, 2NZEF, 1941, p. 3).

<sup>100</sup> The TAB "triple" vaccine protected against typhoid A and B and paratyphoid. It was given to New Zealand forces in three doses, and proved highly effective, with only three 2NZEF deaths in the Middle East attributed to the diseases (Stout and Duncan, 1954, p. 493)

*rising fast every day. Wrote [to] Eva, Mum & Dad, Mam, [unreadable] (RHR), Sam Brooking,<sup>101</sup> Hansens, Hammonds, Sylvia. Very muggy in cabin all day.*

*11/10 [shillings/pence] refund of fees from Eashing mess.*

*Washed shirts. Heated water in zinc tub in bath with hot salt water.*

*Preparing questions for Wed. night Gen. Knowledge Quiz.*

*Bed at 2350 hrs.*

*Southern Cross again.*

## **Tuesday 21st January**

*Coarse changed to SE.*

*Close to Cape Verde Islands. Saw lots of small gulls. Received special warning of 3 submarines. Joined by more escort [sic].*

*Sea very calm.*

*Very Hot & Sultry.*

## **Wednesday 22nd January**

*About 700 miles from Freetown. Course SE.*

*More destroyers. Sea very calm. Extra hot & Sultry.*

*Speed 14 knots.*

## **Thursday 23rd**

*Course ESE.*

*Straight for Freetown.*

*Lecture on precautions against malaria. Sea very calm. Sun extremely hot.*

## **Friday 24th January**

*Course ESE.*

*Sea very calm.*

*Pay day. Drew £3-0-0*

*Heat very bad.*

---

<sup>101</sup> Sam Templeton Brooking was a neighbour of Wally's and a veteran of WWI. His widow, Pat, became Wally's third wife

*Boys had party & ran riot. Great fun — people being bathed complete with uniforms, pyjamas etc. Cabin very muggy and full of empty bottles.*

### **Saturday 25th January**

*Entered mouth of river and anchored at Freetown at 0830 hrs. Close on one hundred ships at anchor in river. Lone 4-engined Jerry plane from Dakar<sup>102</sup> flew along convoy which was in line ahead, & back again. Every gun on ships & shore blazing away at it. No luck. Probably recce plane. Expect raid perhaps at dawn tomorrow. Heat very oppressive.*

*Ship Closed up altogether.*

### **Sunday 26th January**

*Water Ship alongside at 0900 hrs. Pumped fresh water into the Duchess all day. Left at 1730 hrs. Water brought from 30 miles upriver. Worst heat I have ever known today. Only a small quantity of water available so we are to be on very short rations till next Port. Joe Dixon's Birthday.<sup>103</sup> Party at Dinner. Wine (Chablis) & cake. Still at Freetown. Must be on the edge of Hell. Know now why it is called "white man's grave". Real Fever Country.*

### **Monday 27th January**

*Oil tanker alongside all morning on Starboard side. Naval tanker on Port side all night.*

*Heat something terrible.*

*Very poor night's sleep.*

### **Tuesday 28th January**

*Great fun watching Bumboats. Bananas — oranges — Coconuts — Paw-Paws — Mangos — Eggs & Live fowls. Water position very acute. Only 900 tons available & we have used 300 tons of that in 3 days. 600*

---

<sup>102</sup> The French Escadrille 4E operated 4-engined flying boats from Dakar. This incident is referred to in several sources (e.g. 22nd Battalion, 1941, p. 5) but only Wally refers to the plane as 4-engined

<sup>103</sup> Lieutenant Joseph Dixon, another NZ 21st Battalion officer posted to the 18th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcements

*tons to last us at least 14 days.*

*Heat tonight worst I have ever known in my life. Cannot write what I think of West African climate.*

*"White Mans Grave" is just right name.*

### **Wednesday 29th January**

*Left Sierra Leone at daybreak. Sea very, very calm. Heat!?! Nuff sed.*

*Convoy steaming at 13 knots.*

*Not allowed to change from dinner uniform after mess.*

### **Thursday 30th January**

*Sea smooth, light breeze.*

*Sun very hot. Atmosphere below decks almost unbearable.*

*Convoy very close to the "Line". Probably cross during night. Ships hugging the coast. Very efficient little gunboats, destroyers and cruisers all round convoy. Conditions in cabin — terrible at night.*

### **Friday 31st January**

*Sea very easy.*

*Escort — 1 heavy Cruiser, 4 light Cruisers, 2 Gunboats (Very Fast), 2 Destroyers.*

*Paid Company. Drew £3—0—0 self.*

*Crossed Equator at mid-day for second time in 9 months. Wonder how many times I will cross "Line" before end of "Show". Crossed Line on long tangent at 1415 hrs.*

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Saturday 1st February**

*Very busy day indeed. Very hot and muggy. Ship very steady Speed 14 knots. Quite a few men in hospital with heat rash due to using salt water for ablution purposes. Issue of mineral waters twice daily in effort to counteract heat rash.*

*Lying on bunk all evening practicing with Morse Key & Buzzer. Sticky with perspiration. Cabin very "Fuggy" in spite of fan going full blast.*

*Clocks advanced 1 hr at 2359 hrs.*



**Sunday 2nd February**

*Wonder what Cape Town will be like after 8 months absence. Is there still Anti-British feeling being shown by Hertzog Party?*<sup>104</sup>

---

*Sea steady. Temperature down during morning. Very hot and muggy in afternoon. Prepared lecture on "Orders". Doing Home mail. Attended Sing-Song Service in Forward Men's Mess. Rousing Hymns. Excellent short address by Padre Capt. Frank Buck.*<sup>105</sup>

*"Boys" playing Poker in 194. Sewed Stars*<sup>106</sup> *on open necked shirt.*

**Monday 3rd February**

*Sea calm. Heat lower.*

*Arranged Fatigue for pressing Drill Uniforms.*

*Doing correspondence for Home mail.*

*Very busy all day and late at night.*

*Had a [senap?] in cabin. Cleaned up all hands.*

*Great fun.*

*Clocks on 1 hour at midnight.*

**Tuesday 4th February**

*Sea Steady. Light Breeze.*

*Doing 323's all day for deficiencies return. Finished off Home Mail.*

*Fitted Wind Shute*<sup>107</sup> *into porthole.*

*Spent Evening with Mr Feeney, Chief Electrical Engineer, in his cabin.*

*Night considerably cooler.*

<sup>104</sup> J.B.M. Hertzog was leader of the South African United Party and the Prime Minister of South Africa till September 1939, when the United Party rejected his neutral (if conditionally pro-British) line, and he resigned

<sup>105</sup> The Reverend Frank Buck, MC, of the NZ Army Chaplains Department. Buck, a Canadian national, had served as a Chaplin in the Canadian Army Chaplains' Department during WWI (Glen, 1996, pp. 364, 575, Chapter 17, note 13)

<sup>106</sup> Popularly "pips". Star is the formal name

<sup>107</sup> A wind scoop or catcher

### **Wednesday 5th February**

*Sea steady. Speed 14 knots.*

*Morse lesson in afternoon.*

*Practice on Buzzer.*

*Men's drill being pressed & altered by tailor.*

*General Knowledge Quiz in After Men's mess at 2000 hrs. Spent on [how?] in Lounge after Quiz. Drink with Tom Owen.<sup>108</sup>*

*Blackout 1902 hrs.*

### **Thursday 6th February**

*Blackout off 0537 hrs.*

*Sea very calm. Sun very warm.*

*Inspection of Bn by Brig. Hargest<sup>109</sup> (am).*

*Saw school of Porpoises.*

*Saw Albatross.*

*Harangue to Bn by Brig. Hargest re leave at Cape Town, followed by Lecture by MO [Medical Officer] re. dangers of VD infection from natives. Convoy steaming very slowly and changing formation. Some ships going on to Durban. Off Table Bay during night. Due in Port tomorrow. Sea marvellous azure blue.*

*Bill Butland's lecture re. Liaison Officers.<sup>110</sup>*

*Blackout 1842 hrs.*

### **Friday 7th February**

*Sea very calm. Hot. Speed about 5–6 knots. Just cruising round.*

### **Saturday 8th February**

*Arrived Table Bay at Daybreak. Berthed at wharf, Cape Town at 1000 hrs. Paid troops. General Leave — 1400 hrs to 2359 hrs. Up to Table Mountain seeking friends. Not Home. Back to "City Club" (Honorary member). Dinner at Club (Carl<sup>111</sup> & Jack Stevenson). Movies at 2100 hrs — Back to Ship.*

*Table Mountain very Clear.*

**Sunday 9th February***Mountain clear.**Route march for all troops in Convoy. 30,000 in morning. Carl and Self up to visit Connors' after Lunch. Taken out for drive & dinner at Hout Bay Hotel. Called at Hallets' in evening.**Max & Edith Connor.**Miss Pauline Hellet [sic]  
c/o "Coliseum" Theatre<sup>112</sup>***Monday 10th February***Troops Route March. Leave from 1300 hrs. Shopping. Shirts, Shorts, Key & Buzzer, etc. Back to ship with parcels. Changed and met Connors at Customs office at Docks. To their house up mountain for tea. Coliseum Theatre to see "Hired Wife".<sup>113</sup> Out to Hallets for Supper. On board at 0100 hrs. Majority of officers later than this but I am not attracted by the Bright Lights of Cape Town. Wish my beloved wife was with me to celebrate today's Anniversary.**[Entry highlighted with crosses at each corner.]***Tuesday 11th February***Route March 8–9 miles in morning. Carl and Self met at Dock Gates at 1315 hrs. Drove to the Strand, False Bay, on Indian Ocean.<sup>114</sup> Into*

<sup>108</sup> 2nd Lieutenant Thomas Owen, HQ 6th NZ Infantry Brigade

<sup>109</sup> James Hargest. According to his fellow New Zealander, Major General Kippenberger in 1951, had Hargest not died in France, "he would probably have been the present [NZ] Prime Minister" (quoted in D'Este, 1994 [2001], p. 280). Wally's description of an "harangue" to the battalion, gives a slightly different perspective on this officer

<sup>110</sup> William Butland (see note 87)

<sup>111</sup> Carl Ferguson

<sup>112</sup> A cinema

<sup>113</sup> An American romantic comedy directed by William Seiter and starring Rosalind Russell and Brian Aherne

<sup>114</sup> The Strand is on the Atlantic, not the Indian Ocean side of the Cape peninsular

foothills of Drakenstein Mountains. Visited Lourensford House and Park (now Hotel), Somerset West, CP [Cape Province]. Back to Cape Town. Moon rising over Drakenstein Mts & sun setting over Table Mountain. [Two crude sketches showing this]. Back into city & then to Connors' home for snack. Bought fruit at "The Parade" City markets. On board J24 at 2345 hrs. 21 men AWL [AWOL — Absent Without Leave] from D Coy.

### **Wednesday 12th February**

Short route march. No Leave. Picquets ashore collecting stragglers. Moved out into Table Bay at 1500 hrs and left about 1630 hrs. South towards Cape of Good Hope which was rounded late at night. Lights of City and along coast remarkable sight as we steamed away into the darkness. Left 7 men AWOL from D Coy.

Celebrated 1st Wedding Anniversary tonight as we were ashore on 10/2/41. Gordon Rouge [sic] — Champagne.

Water rationed again.

### **Thursday 13th February**

Very steep sea running all day with occasional showers. Wind quite chilly but temperature rising towards evening. Ship rolling very heavily in cross sea. All life boats raised up onto davits today. Steaming in Indian Ocean towards Durban.

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Due Egypt about end of this month. I think we will be there about 4–6 weeks. Expect we will move to Albania, Balkans or Turkey about April. What of the Future? All is in the hands of God. We can only put our trust in Him. We must.

### **Friday 14th February**

Steady Sea. Course ENE. 14 knots.

Temperature rising. Paid men. Issued one Free copy of Blitztourist<sup>115</sup> to each man. Ship moving with a steady roll.

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<sup>115</sup> A comic on-board magazine characterised by its racy cartoons

*Sad news — We are not to call at Durban, Mombasa, Colombo or Aden. Next stop Suez & I suppose ere long that sink of iniquity Cairo. Dread the filth and the flies that will be our lot in the Near East.*

### **Saturday 15th February**

*Sea Easy. 14 knots. Various Orderly Room Duties. Washed and ironed clothes using my patent zinc water heater & that terrible brown Cape Town water. Beer supplies very low & rationing of same instituted in all canteens & Lounges. Passed Durban about midday, but well out to sea & out of sight of land.*

*Cabin very stuffy tonight. All the boys out to parties. Very merry when they returned to home at 3 am. Jack Stevenson's trousers on fire. Sticky work by John Hefford<sup>116</sup> as fireman.*

### **Sunday 16th February**

*Sea Calm & Oily.*

*Very muggy day.*

*Joined by rest of Convoy out of Durban plus another ship. All the lads with very sore heads this morning. Sandford sick all night. Busy on Shortages, Fatigues and getting General Knowledge Questions. Attended Sing-Song in Aft. Men's Mess with Padres Hiddlestone, Buck & Hirst [Hurst].<sup>117</sup> Good rousing hymns. Carl & self to visit Mr Feeney, Chief EE. Heard report of an attack on Convoy bound to England off Madeira, number of ships lost & no doubt our English mail posted at Freetown. Our mails are having a bad spin.*

### **Monday 17th February**

*Sea Flat Calm. Running north through Mozambique Channel between Madagascar & mainland of Africa. Crossed Tropic of Capricorn today. Chairman for Col. Waite,<sup>118</sup> MLC [Member of the New Zealand*

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<sup>116</sup> Lieutenant John Hefford of the 5th Field Ambulance, NZ Medical Corps

<sup>117</sup> Padres John Hiddlestone and William Hurst (see note 88)

<sup>118</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Fred Waite, a veteran of Gallipoli, was a former Member of Parliament and overseas commissioner for New Zealand's National Patriotic Fund Board

Legislative Council], who gave interesting lecture on Progress of War & New Zealand's part in it to men in Aft. Mess. Very hot night. Two heavy cruisers did a "Shoot" with 8 in. guns. Many full salvos fired. Great sight to see warship work up to full speed. Huge bow wave although sea was flat calm.

## **Tuesday 18th February**

Ripple on water. Light Breeze.

Conducted Defence of Cpl Houghton in FGCM [Field General Court Martial]. Scott as Council for Defence. Jordan before CO & remanded. Drew up fresh charges re. theft of Letter & Razor. Heat in cabin almost unbearable, and it is will get hotter every day. Wait till we reach Red Sea.

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No news over wireless.

Heavy downpour of Tropical Rain at 2230 hrs. J24 Fired about 12 rds from 6 in. gun. Range about 4–5 miles.

Clocks on 1 hr at midnight

## **Wednesday 19th February**

Sea calm but slight ripple.

Heat very oppressive.

Entered Cape Town AWOL Fines and Kit Deficiencies in Pay Books.

Jordan tried for theft of Razor & Letter.

28 Days Detention,

27 Days CB [confined to barracks].

General Knowledge Quiz in Men's Mess After Dining Room. Damned hot.

Shirt & shorts soaking wet with perspiration.

## **Thursday 20th February**

Sea calm — ripple.

Still in Mozambique Channel. Heat terrible. Med. [medical] Inspection of men after Cape Town —VD. Lecture by Major Nicholl [Nicoll],<sup>119</sup> Div. Cav. Col. Mackay's<sup>120</sup> [Macky's] Birthday (50).

*Celebration in Lounge. Party continued after Mess. Marvellous sight — 2 intoxicated Cols (Mackay & Andrews) [Macky & Andrew]<sup>121</sup> standing on top of grand piano very incoherent trying to sing or bellow out “A Hundred Pipers an A.” Song not a great success. Sleep almost impossible tonight owing to the great muggy heat. Body all sticky in spite of repeated sponging with damp cloth. Sounds of much & great jollity from all over the ship. Wish they would close down as it is now 1 am.*

### **Friday 21st February**

*Sea Calm. Nearing Equator once more. Hope this heat does not last too long.*

*Pay Day. Drew £1–10–0. Very busy with Pay Cards. Books back from Pay Office after Audit to 31st Dec. Meeting of Entertainment Committee. Spent evening writing mail for England and Home. Long time getting to sleep owing to heat. Saw Porpoises. Frigate Bird.*

### **Saturday 22nd February**

*Sea calm. Light Breeze, Speed 12 knots.*

*Men dressed boots with Dubbin at Muster Stations. Sports and entertainment afternoon. Tallest man, etc.*

*Monarch of Bermuda dropped back to pass mail to HMS Hawkins.<sup>122</sup>*

*Caught up to convoy later. Convoy speed increased to about 16 knots at 1300 hrs. Crossed “Line” today for 5th time. Carl & I spent evening with Elect. Engineer, Mr Feeney.*

*Turned in at 2330 hrs.*

*Very Close in cabin.*

*[Episode repeated:] Met by HMS Hawkins at 1600 hrs. Monarch of Bermuda stopped to transfer mail to warship.*

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<sup>119</sup> Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Arthur Nicoll of the 2nd NZ Divisional Cavalry.

<sup>120</sup> Neil Macky, Commanding Officer of the NZ 21st Battalion, until relieved/dismissed after the allied defeat in Greece

<sup>121</sup> Leslie Andrew, VC, Commanding Officer of the NZ 22nd Battalion.

<sup>122</sup> A WWI heavy cruiser operating in the Indian Ocean. Earlier that month Hawkins had supported Operation Canvas, the allied invasion of Italian Somaliland. She survived the war and was scrapped in 1947

### **Sunday 23rd February**

*Sea steady — Good cool breeze.*

*Church at 1030 hrs (Padre Frank Buck).*

*Compiling questions for General Knowledge Quiz. Bought, Soap, Optrex, etc. at shop.*

*Good sleep during afternoon.*

*Cold shower before mess.*

*Sewing during evening.*

*Song Service in After Mess, C Deck.*

### **Monday 24th February**

*Sea Steady. Fair Breeze. Cooler during day. Close and muggy at night after Ports are closed. Writing mail for NZ. Had check made on all men's Greatcoats.*

*Chairman for Col. Waite in Mess Room in evening. Very excellent talk.*

*Started and Finished "The Doctor" by Rinehart.<sup>123</sup> Most interesting book.*

*Lights out — 0300 hrs (25/2/41). Visit from inebriated officers.*

*Repelled boarders.*

### **Tuesday 25th February**

*Beautiful day, Sea easy. Splendid cool breeze.*

*Checking pay books all afternoon.*

*Last day in Indian Ocean. Manoeuvring near Socotra in afternoon waiting for darkness. Passed by large Arab Dhow going south.*

*Passing between Cape Gardafui and Socotra at midnight and so in to Gulf of Aden.*

—

*In the Red Sea at 2130 hrs and steaming at 14 knots. Paravanes out on both sides of ship as we are in heavily mined areas.*

### **Wednesday 26th February**

*Sea steady. Fresh breeze. Temperature very agreeable. Land to port.*

*Probably part of Italian Somaliland. Passed several steamers plodding along on their own. Last Pay today in Stirling Currency. Next will be in*



*Egyptian. General Knowledge Quiz in Men's Mess Aft. Home to a rowdy party in Quarters. Ted Caldwell's birthday.<sup>124</sup> Visited engine room today. As sweet a set of engines as I have ever seen in a vessel. Oil fuelled boilers and turbine propulsion. Censoring NZ mail & writing Home, etc.*

### **Thursday 27th February**

*Fine but very hot. No breeze in am. Joined by corvettes & destroyers from Aden. All battle dress handed in and packed in bags. Photography allowed during this afternoon only. Free for all on deck. Various groups taken. Joined by 4 ships from NZ: Takliwa, Waimarama, Varsova, President Doumer.<sup>125</sup> Destroyers circling round convoy at great rate. Passed Aden. Perim Lighthouse dead abeam to Starboard at 2030 hrs. Very impressive spectacle. Long range revolving light visible over 40 miles. Many small fixed lights on Perim side of narrows. Passed Mecca.*

### **Friday 28th February**

*Fair sea running in Red Sea & good breeze. Paravanes still out. 14 knots. Various Coy jobs. Grand Final Concert in Lounge and Mock Orderly Room. Very Successful & most amusing. Only 2 more days at sea.*

*Quiet night in Cabin.*

*No inebriates.*

## **MARCH**

### **Saturday 1st March**

*Sea Flat Calm but strong Fresh breeze blowing. Speed 10 knots. 0730 hrs President Doumer left Convoy.*

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<sup>123</sup> An almost forgotten 1936 romantic mystery by the American author Mary Rinehart  
<sup>124</sup> Captain Edward Caldwell of the NZ 23rd Battalion. Caldwell was captured during fighting around Kalamata, in Greece (Ross, 1959, p. 53)

<sup>125</sup> Président Doumer (a troopship) and Waimarama (an armed merchantman) were later lost, the Waimarama in August 1943 off Cap Bon, Tunisia, blown up by a Ju 88, the Président Doumer the following October, off Madeira, torpedoed by U604. Both the Takliwa and Varsova (troopships) survived the war. Wally spelled Doumer, "Doumier", and Takliwa "Takiwa"

*Tidying up gear preparatory to packing for disembarkation. Writing airmail letter for Dearest Eva. Darning socks. More to letter in evening.*

### **Sunday 2nd March**

*Steaming 14 knots.*

*Sea very choppy and heavy beam roll. Temperature quite cold again.*

*Packing Orderly Room gear into Box and generally preparing for disembarkation. Attended Non-Conformist Communion service at 1100 in forward Mess (Padre Hiddlestone — Congregation).*

*Convoy changed formation into two lines preparatory to entering Gulf of Suez. Spent evening with Padres Hiddlestone, Buck & Carl & Mr Heaney. Probably last dinner on board Duchess of Bedford — J24. Autographed menu card.*

*Night very chilly. Heavy sandstorm during day.*

*Clocks back an hour at midnight.*

### **Monday 3rd March**

*Passed into Gulf of Suez at 0400 hrs.*

*Passed Mt Sinai at 0600 hrs.*

*Sailing close to Egyptian Shore — Arabian desert to Starboard. Nothing but sand on both sides of Gulf of Suez. Very depressing country. Convoy well stretched out in 2 columns. Anchored at Port Tewfik. Suez at noon. Greatest collection of Shipping I have ever seen.*

*Extremely cold at night.*

*Canal bombed & closed.*

### **Tuesday 4th March**

*Closed up Orderly Room.*

*Farewell to Tom Feeney.*

*Packing gear.*

*Visit from Brigadier.*

*Moored about two miles from entrance to canal.*

*Last night on board J24.*

### ***Maadi Camp***

The troops carried by HMT *Duchess of Bedford* arrived in Egypt in time to join the allies' abortive Greek campaign but instead of being reassigned to one of his previous (fighting) units, the NZ 18th or 21st, Wally found himself posted to the NZ 31st Infantry Training Battalion, based at Maadi Camp, south of Cairo. Apart from a fortnight on a course in Hygiene and Sanitation taught at Sarafand Camp, Palestine, he spent the next eight and a half months at Maadi (Figures 22, 23 and 32), in nearby Helwan (Figure 28), in Cairo (Figures 29, 31, 33–5 etc.), and in the desert roundabout. His roles during this period were primarily administrative, command and training-related and—prior to his assignment to the NZGREU the following September—included Battalion Orderly Officer, Officer Commanding the Guard, Platoon Commander, Censor and Assistant Regimental Quartermaster. This period at Maadi was far from arduous: in the diary, he seems always to be writing letters, shopping, going to the “Club” and going to the cinema. There was time, too, to see the sights (Figures 24–6) and to get to know the Egyptian capital. But it also provided time for acclimatisation and skills-development—for the individual soldier, through ever longer route marches and instruction in an increasing range of weaponry and other equipment; and for Wally, through experience in a variety of different junior command and administrative roles, which together with his training at Sarafand in hygiene and sanitation, helped fit him for his future role with the NZGREU. Meanwhile, the war news was bad. Rommel began his first drive eastwards towards Cairo, the allied defence of Greece fell apart, and Operations Brevity and Battleaxe—to neither of which Wally refers—failed. The contrast between such events and Wally's easy life in Maadi and Cairo and the simplicity of his expressions of pride in New Zealand's forces is striking.

### **Wednesday 5th March**

*Reveille 0400 hrs.*

*Breakfast 0500 hrs.*

*On Deck ready to disembark at 0600 hrs.  
Barges alongside at 0900 hrs. Entrained at 1010 hrs. What a train.  
Part full of foul & evil smelling Arabs. Via Cairo to El Maadi Camp.  
Marched 3 miles. Bn broken up. Posted to (31st) Auckland Training Bn.<sup>126</sup>  
4th Bde gone to Salonika.<sup>127</sup> Saw Pyramids, Citadel, Camels, Donkeys,  
Bougainvillea. Via Valley of the Kings.<sup>128</sup> Largest & queerest Cemetery I  
have ever seen. Bed early. Mess full of (Italian) trophies taken by 18th  
Bn.*

### **Thursday 6th March**

*Administrative Work.*

*Sightseeing Tour of Great Camp (Figures 22 and 23).*

*Photo taken for Passport.*

*Into Cairo with other Auckland officers to Imperial Ordinance Stores. Via  
banks of the Nile. Very Fertile. Filth and Squalor something terrible.*

*Repacking & Bed at 2230 hrs.*



**Figure 22**

Maadi Camp (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)



**Figure 23**

Maadi Camp looking north towards the Pyramids (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

### **Friday 7th March**

*Cold morning.*

*Coy Parade 0815 hrs. Route March of about 6–7 miles across desert.*

*What a dreary waste. Pay Day. 500 Piastres. Lecture by Capt. Day on Egypt and all its sins & pitfalls. No Leave. Puttees ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) & Hose tops from NZ Ordinance. Received collection of mail from NZ. Bunch of corker snaps of my Beloved (& Mam), Air mail from Doy<sup>129</sup> & Winnie. Wrote Air mail to Eva. Received beautiful lock of hair from Curley-Top.<sup>130</sup>*

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<sup>126</sup> The NZ 31st Infantry (Training) Battalion

<sup>127</sup> The 4th NZ Infantry Brigade comprised the NZ 18th, 19th and 20th Battalions

<sup>128</sup> Presumably the City of the Dead, a vast Islamic necropolis. The “Valley of the Kings” is of course in Luxor

<sup>129</sup> Wally’s sister, Dorothy

<sup>130</sup> Wally’s wife, Eva

*Writing Evening.  
Hot day — Cold night.*

### **Saturday 8th March**

*Route March to Maadi & back to Camp. Left Camp at 1500 hrs & went to Cairo by taxi. Visited Bazaars, NZ Club.<sup>131</sup> Dinner at Club & back to Camp early in evening. 21st Bn disembarked and went to Helwan. Fine Railcars on E [Egyptian] State Rlys. Some old Steam Cars & Some Diesel (Figure 24).*

*Fine moonlight [sic] evenings.*



**Figure 24**

Railcar, probably at Maadi Station (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

### **Sunday 9th March**

*Church Service at Camp in EFI [Expeditionary Forces Institute] Hut.<sup>132</sup> Leave — Cairo by taxi. Lunch at Club. Out to Meena [Mena] by tram (1 Pt [piastre]). Visited Great Pyramid of Cheops. Through passages. Saw other Pyramids. Visited Sphinx and Ancient Temple (Figures 25–27).*



**Figure 25**  
New Zealand soldiers  
on top of the Great  
Pyramid (photo:  
unknown New  
Zealand soldier)



*Free ride back to Cairo. Dinner at Club. Taxi back to Camp (30 Pt). Very enjoyable day.*

*Night — Clear, Cold & moonlit*

### **Monday 10th March**

*Little breeze. Very hot on desert. Digging trenches out on desert all day. Cold at night. Writing to Eva & Mum for Air mail tomorrow. Bed at 2200 hrs.*

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<sup>131</sup> The New Zealand Forces Club on Sharia Malik Farida (**Figure 32**)

<sup>132</sup> The Expeditionary Forces Institute was the equivalent of the NAAFI “in theatre”



**Figure 26**  
UK soldiers at the  
mortuary temple of  
Chephren at Giza  
(photo: unknown  
British soldier)

**Tuesday 11th March**

*Cool in early morning.*

*Battalion Orderly officer.*

*Censored and Franked Bn mail.*

*Air mail to Mum & Dad & to Eva & Win.*

*Bed at 2230 hrs.*

**Wednesday 12th March**

*Very hot day.*

*Lecture platoon in attack and practical demonstration in vicinity of*



rifle range. Talk on Western Desert Campaign and exhibition of War Trophies.

Bed early. Feel very drowsy in this climate. Did a moonlight stalk and "pinched" timber to build a table for cubicle.

### **Thursday 13th March**

Tactical scheme in Desert.

Coy & Platoon in Defence. Finished off table. Early to bed.

### **Friday 14th March**

Very heavy sandstorm raging. Everything under sand and dust. Various lectures all day.

Visited Maadi Club for a drink & back to camp.

### **Saturday 15th March**

Wind dropped.



**Figure 27**

The Sphynx (photo: unknown)

*Proceeded to Helwan Hospital as OC Guard. 1 officer, 1 sgt, 30 [or 31] ORs.*

*Very interesting & pretty township.*

*Italian prisoners. Hospital in large hotel (Winter Garden Palace Hotel).*

**(Figure 28)**



**Figure 28**

Helwan Hospital (photo: Jim Vernon)

### **Sunday 16th March**

*Guard Parade 0900 hrs.*

*Guard Rounds at 1000 hrs.*

*Walked around Helwan & did a spot of photography.*

*2 men AWOL in Cairo.*

*Walk in the town in Evening.*

*Guard Rounds 2030 hrs.*

### **Monday 17th March**

*Parade 0900 hrs.*

*Visit from Brig. Fellows (9th Bde) and Col. J. Allen<sup>133</sup> re. riot in Cairo involving 2 of Guard Personnel. Both men taken off to detention & replaced by Green & Sullivan.*

*Guard Rounds 2100 hrs.*

## **Tuesday 18th March**

*Guard Inspection at Guard Room at 0900 hrs.*

*Shopping in Helwan during morning. Sgt Mack & self out to "Japanese Gardens" in afternoon. Collected Photos in afternoon. 28th Bn (Maori) moved out this morning.*

*Did Guard rounds about 2200 hrs.*

*Night Chilly.*

## **Wednesday 19th March**

*Guard Parade 0900 hrs.*

*Visited photographers (Kodak).*

*Guard Rounds 1030 hrs.*

*Sent 2 Ital. medical orderlies out on leave without escort to Japanese Gardens, Town etc.*

*Hockey match, N v. S [North versus South] Islands.*

*Handsome Cap (?Homemade).*

*Win for North Island. 6 Goals to 1 Goal.*

*Guard Rounds 2200 hrs.*

## **Thursday 20th March**

*Guard Inspection 0900 hrs.*

*Took over new Guard Room at gate.*

*Paid a visit to POW Camp in afternoon.*

*Left photo of Eva and one of myself to be copied in enlarged pencil sketches.*

*Writing letters for air mail Home.*

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<sup>133</sup> Lieutenant Colonel John Allen succeeded Neil Macky as CO of the NZ 21st Battalion. He was killed in action at Sidi Rezegh (Cody, 1953, pp. 131–32)

*Guard Rounds 0845 hrs.*

*Guard Rounds 2245 hrs.*

### **Friday 21st March**

*Posted Air Mail to Eva.*

*Posted Book to Dad.*

*Guard Rounds 1030 hrs.*

*Paid Guard at 1330 hrs and assisted Pay clerks with payments of certain patient [in ward] 8a.*

*During tour of inspection at 2330 found sentry in ward 4b in drunken stupor. Disarmed him and had him placed in confinement in cells. Sentry at 8b also drunk. Arrested.*

*Bed at 0430 hrs (21/3/41).*

### **Saturday 22nd March**

*Report to 31 Bn re. trouble with Guard. Visit from Col. Allen. All leave of Guard personnel cancelled. Guard rounds at 0945 & 2030 & 2359 hrs.*

*Letter writing in between guard rounds in evening.*

*Guard defaulters replaced by men from 31st Bn.*

### **Sunday 23rd March**

*Busy all morning.*

*Took parade of Guard to Church Service in main mess Hall of Hospital.*

*Working in Coy Office till dinner time. After Lunch: Surprise visit from Jim Williamson of Long Range Desert Patrol & George Orme of OCTU [Officer Cadet Training Unit].<sup>134</sup> (Left at 1700 hrs).*

*Guards rounds at 1145 hrs & 2300 hrs.*

### **Monday 24th March**

*Preparing charges.*

*CO's Orderly room during most of the day.*

*Guards rounds at 1030 hrs & 2200 hrs.*

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<sup>134</sup> Private James Williamson and George Orme of the NZ 21st Battalion. 2680 George Orme is recorded as both a Corporal and a Captain. He was captured on the 13th of December 1941

*New Zealand Base — Arrisé [Larissa], Greece.*

### **Tuesday 25th March**

*CO's Orderly Room at 2nd NZG Hospital [NZGH—New Zealand General Hospital].*

*Guard Rounds 1130.*

*Guard relieved by 32nd Battalion.*

*Returned to Maadi Camp.*

### **Wednesday 26th March**

*With Lt Col. Allen re. Guard's Tour of Duty at Helwan. French digging out on desert towards escarpment. Free afternoon. Bed Early in evening.*

### **Thursday 27th March**

*CO's Orderly Room in morning re. Judd (of Guard).*

*Excavations during afternoon.*

### **Friday 28th March**

*Finish off Pte Judd's trial. Guilty and received 5 days detention.*

*Digging for RAP [Regimental Aid Post].*

*Helwan in evening with Clyde Williams<sup>135</sup> to do some shopping.*

*Diesel Rail Car (Figure 24).*

*(Very fast).*

### **Saturday 29th March**

*Digging at RAP Site.*

*Afternoon Free.*

*Writing letters Home.*

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*Movies with Clyde.*

*"That's my Girl"*

*"Desert Patrol" (From "Patrol" by Crosby [Crosbie] Garstin. Great Picture & Great Book).<sup>136</sup>*

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<sup>135</sup> Lieutenant Clyde Williams of the NZ 21st Battalion

### **Sunday 30th March**

*Attended Church Service in EFI. Visited Japanese Gardens with Clyde. Tea at "Homestead" Club,<sup>137</sup> Helwan. Bought Tapestry.*

*Bed Early.*

### **Monday 31st March**

*Collected "Battle Dress" from Ordinance Stores.*

*Pressed same & repaired button-holes, etc.*

*Excavations for Command Post & RAP.*

*Letter writing in evening.*

## **APRIL**

### **Tuesday 1st April**

*Swotting up Drill Etc.*

*Helwan to collect snaps.*

### **Wednesday 2nd April**

*Catalogued negatives in morning.*

*Free afternoon.*

*Movies in Evening.*

### **Thursday 3rd April**

*Appointed OC no 1 Platoon, R. [Soldiers?] Coy.*

*Took Coy for Route March (8 miles).*

*Drill with Coy in afternoon.*

*Movies to see Gitta.<sup>138</sup>*

*Good Picture.*

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<sup>136</sup> Crosbie Garstin wrote no such book. The film could either be John Ford's 1934 film *The Lost Patrol*, starring Victor McLaglen and Boris Karloff, which was based on the book *Patrol* by Philip MacDonald, or a forgotten 1938 B-movie Western, *Desert Patrol*, directed by Sam Newfield and starring Bob Steele, which had an original screenplay.

<sup>137</sup> Set up by Mrs D. Spence (see diary entries for the 4th, 6th and 12th of September 1942) (McKinney, 1952, p. 37)

<sup>138</sup> Another unidentifiable movie. Possibly Wally is referring to a film starring the singer and actress Gitta Alpár

**Friday 4th April**

*Coy work all day.*

*Pay Parade.*

*Helwan in evening with Clyde Williams. Supper at the Club (Homestead).*

**Saturday 5th April**

*Coy Drill all morning. Maadi in afternoon for haircut & bought silk stockings for Eva. In Camp in Evening.*

**Sunday 6th April**

*Church Parade. Leave in Cairo*

*Lunch at NZ Forces Club. Visited Bazaars. Silk stockings for Eva. Tea at Club — Home by rail car.*

**Monday 7th April**

*Wiring instructions on Desert.*

*Swim at Maadi Club.<sup>139</sup>*

*Night Wiring.*

*Bed 2230.*

**Tuesday 8th April**

*Wiring all Day.*

*Duty officer at "G" Office from 2030 hrs till 0830 tomorrow. Transferred to A Coy for report.*

*6 letters from Eva & a lot of others.*

*Wrote to Eva.*

**Wednesday 9th April**

*Routine work with A Coy. Marched A Coy to Maadi baths & back to Camp.*

*Helwan for tea with Selwin [Selwyn] Hirst<sup>140</sup> & Joe Dixon. Left Films at Kodak Shop.*

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<sup>139</sup> The swimming baths at Maadi were inaugurated by General Freyberg, a former champion swimmer

<sup>140</sup> 2nd Lieutenant Selwyn Hirst of the NZ 21st Battalion.

**Thursday 10th April**

*Work with Coy all day.*

*Pay Parade in afternoon.*

*Went to Camp pictures in Evening.*

**Friday 11th April**

*Spent all day in Camp.*

*Went to Helwan in evening — Called at Kodak shop for snaps & had supper at "The Homestead" Club.*

**Saturday 12th April**

*Battalion Parade then spent whole morning censoring mail. Cairo after lunch with Clyde Williams. Visited Institute of Hygiene. (Ghastly Exhibits). Returned to Camp early after tea at club.*

**Sunday 13th April**

*Marched A Coy to Church Parade. Attended Presbyterian Communion in YMCA Hut<sup>141</sup> & then had a good snooze.*

*Pictures in evening.*

**Monday 14th April**

*Reveill  0500 hrs. Battalion Route march of 10 miles. Afternoon free. Letter writing and a certain amount of censoring. Helwan with Carl Ferguson.*

**Tuesday 15th April**

*Coy work under Training Cadre. Recreational Training 1600–1730. Lecture in Evening.*

**Wednesday 16th April**

*Coy Training Programme all day.*

*In Camp in evening.*

**Thursday 17th April**

*Battalion Route March 12 miles across desert. Solid going. Siesta 1300–1600 hrs. Writing in evening after lecture.*

*No Leave.*



**Friday 18th April**

*With Company all morning. Pay Parade 1600 hrs.*

*Carl & I to Helwan. Bought very nice Photo Album for Eva.*

*Supper at "Homestead Club", Helwan.*

**Saturday 19th April**

*Up at 0400 hours. Went to rifle and LMG [light machine gun] Range at Abbysia [Abbassia] with A Coy. Back at 1330 hrs. Writing & censoring letters & siesta in afternoon. Remained in & early to bed. NZ Division doing "Good Work" in Olympus Pass in Greece.*

**Sunday 20th April**

*Letter writing during day. Helwan with Clyde Williams. Afternoon Tea & supper at Club.*

**Monday 21st April**

*Transferred to Bn as assistant RQ [Regimental Quartermaster] to 31st Bn.*

*Q [QM — Quartermaster] work all day.*

**Tuesday 22nd April**

*QM work all day.*

*Lecture in evening in Ante room.*

*Home in evening*

**Wednesday 23rd April**

*QM work all day.*

*D Coy marched out at 1030 hrs.*

*B Coy marched out at 1230 hrs.*

*Both Coys on security work. Equipped to War Establishment.<sup>142</sup>*

*Helwan with Carl Ferguson in evening to leave film and collect snaps at Kodak.*

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<sup>141</sup> Presumably Maadi Camp's YMCA "Lowry Hut", funded by the NZ racehorse breeder Thomas Lowry

<sup>142</sup> Equipped with full wartime kit

### **Thursday 24th April**

*Very busy all day with indents for tentage and supplies for 5th Reifs [Reinforcements] now due to arrive from Enzed [NZ].*

*Home in evening.*

*D Coy } marched out on Security mission at { 1030 hrs.  
B Coy } 1230 hrs.*

### **Friday 25th April**

*Anzac Day. Enzed still upholding traditions of 1915 at Olympus & Thermopylae.*

*Very busy at QM Store.*

*Tentage arriving for new Reinforcement Drafts now due (5th).*

*Home in evening.*

### **Saturday 26th April**

*Carrying out QM duties today.*

*Went into Cairo with Carl Ferguson. Shopping. Haircut at NZ Club.*

*Dinner at Club.*

*Train to Helwan to collect Photos & papers.*

*Back to Camp.*

### **Sunday 27th April**

*No rest for wicked.*

*Working all day.*

*Home in evening.*

*News of German occupation of Athens at 0925 hrs today.*

*Evacuation of our troops in progress.*

### **Monday 28th April**

*Busy doing all QM work for 31 Bn Indents to DADOS [Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services] for Camp Equipment, Clothing, Anti-Gas Equipment.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Tuesday 29th April**

*Work in stores and visits to Dados.*

Lecture on *M. Machine Guns* [MMG — medium machine gun]. With Carl to Helwan.

*Back and had difficulty in getting taxi from Maadi Stn to Camp.*

### **Wednesday 30th April**

*Q work all day.*

*Home in evening.*

*News of Evacuation of Greece.*

## **MAY**

### **Thursday 1st May**

*Q work all day.*

*News of 18 Bn — O.K.*

*21 Bn ?*

*(21 Bn reported cut to pieces in rear-guard action. Approx. 7 offs [&] 200 ORs survive).*

### **Friday 2nd May**

*Q office All day.*

*Cairo in late afternoon. Tea at NZ Club. To see “Great Dictator”<sup>143</sup> with Carl.*

*Diana Theatre (Figure 29).<sup>144</sup>*

### **Saturday 3rd May**

*Working all day collecting stores from DADOS and carting to new camp site on T Area. [tent ed area?]*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Sunday 4th May**

*Q work in morning.*

*Siesta in afternoon.*

*Home in Evening.*

---

<sup>143</sup> Charlie Chaplin's classic political satire

<sup>144</sup> The Diana Palace, a still extant Art Deco cinema built in 1932, located on Sharia Mohammed Bek al-Alfi

**Monday 5th May**

*Work with Q office in morning*

*Home in evening. Made models for sand tray for lectures.*

**Tuesday 6th May**

*Q work.*

*Collecting Stores from DADOS.*

*Helwan with Carl.*

*Met 21st Bn Boys from Greece.*



**Figure 29**  
The Diana Palace  
cinema (photo,  
unknown)

**Wednesday 7th May**

*B Coy returned at 0300 hrs from Desert.*

*Home in evening.*

**Thursday 8th May**

*D Coy returned 1900 hrs. New Base Camp (Tented) ready for reinforcements.*

*Khamsin blowing very hard.*

*Temp. 109° F in shade for several days*

**Friday 9th May**

*Very busy all day at DADOS.*

*Pay Day.*

*Home in evening.*

**Saturday 10th May**

*Worked all day.*

*Coys moved over to "Snake Gully".*

*Home in evening.*

**Sunday 11th May**

*Mothers' Day.*

*Wrote to Grandmother.*

*Worked all day.*

*Home in evening.*

**Monday 12th May**

*Very busy at Dados and getting Messes ready for new Reif. Draft.*

*Home in evening.*

**Tuesday 13th May**

*Doy's Birthday.*

*Very busy all day at DADOS.*

*In Camp in evening.*

**Wednesday 14th May**

*Q work all day.*

*Camp in evening.*

**Thursday 15th May**

*Very, Very busy.*

*Transferred to T Area of 31 Bn Camp as RQM [Regimental Quartermaster].*

*5th Reifs arrived at 6.30 pm.*

*No leave.*

**Friday 16th May**

*Organisation.*

*No leave.*

**Saturday 17th May**

*Q work in T Area.*

*No leave.*

**Sunday 18th May**

*Q Work.*

*No leave.*

**Saturday 17th–Sunday 18th May**

*All 5th Reifs Quarantined because of Flu.*

**Monday 19th–Tuesday 20th May**

*Equipping 5th Reifs with Gear. New clothing.*

**Wednesday 21st May**

*Preparing for issue of Webb. [webbing], Rifles & Respirators.*

*No Leave.*

**Thursday 22nd May**

*Issued Webb. Equipment.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Friday 23rd May**

*Busy on issue of gear.*

*Not out of Camp.*

**Saturday 24th May**

*Issuing various Gear.*

*No Leave.*

**Sunday 25th May**

*QM Work all day.*

*No leave.*

**Monday 26th May**

*Issue of Rifles to 5th Reifs.  
No Leave.*

**Tuesday 27th May**

*Issue of Gear.  
Helwan to Kodak shop. Cairo by train. To Kodak. Left wrist watch for repairs. Shopping. Dinner alone at Club. Maadi by Taxi.*

**Wednesday 28th May**

*Issue of expendable stores.  
Home in evening.*

**Thursday 29th May**

*186 rifles arrived.  
Repaired Camp Stretcher.  
Home in evening.  
Cigarette Issue.*

**Friday 30th May**

*Duties all day.  
Home in Evening.*

**Saturday 31st May**

*Dysentery [sic] very rife in Camp.  
Home all evening.*

**JUNE**

**Sunday 1st June**

*Easy Day.  
Letter writing.  
Received 20 Letters for 7 days ending today. Eng. [England] & NZ.*

**Monday 2nd June**

*QM Duties.  
Home in Evening.*

### **Tuesday 3rd June**

*Store & office all morning. Charlie Cato<sup>145</sup> marched into camp today. Helwan to 18th & 21st Bns. Shopping in Helwan. Left films for D & P [developing and printing].  
Home.*

### **Wednesday 4th June**

*Store all day.  
Charlie Cato over for Supper.  
4 Letters: 2 Eva, 1 Doy, 1 Mum (L.S.).*

### **Thursday 5th June**

*QM Store all day.  
Home in Evening.*

### **Friday 6th June**

*QM Store in morning.*

---

*Helwan at 1400 to collect snaps and leave negatives. Tea at Club. Home 1900 hrs.*

### **Saturday 7th June**

*QM all day.  
Home in evening.*

### **Sunday 8th June**

*Eva's Birthday.*

*Work all day.  
In Camp in Evening.*

### **Monday 9th June**

*Work all day.  
Movies at night — Pall Mall Theatre — Saw "Submarine Patrol".<sup>146</sup>  
Won't say anything about it except — Terrible.*

---

<sup>145</sup> Private William (Charles) Cato of the Infantry Reinforcements



**Tuesday 10th June**

*QM in morning.*

*Helwan in afternoon re. Films & Watch (not ready).*

*Home in Evening.*

**Wednesday 11th June**

*Store all day.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Thursday 12th June**

*Routine as usual.*

*Letter writing in Evening.*

*I to Mum & Dad, I to Eva, I to Rev. Stych.<sup>147</sup>*

**Friday 13th June**

*Pay Day.*

*Routine in Morning.*

*Helwan & Maadi after lunch to do shopping. Watch repaired. Bought Silk pyjamas for Eva, P.T. 150. Home 2030 hrs.*

**Saturday 14th June**

*Posted Eva's Pyjamas.*

*Routine Work.*

*Home in evening.*

**Sunday 15th<sup>148</sup>**

*Commenced issue to complete men marching out on draft to 19 & 21 Bns. Issue of Helmets, Pith. Withdrawal of Battle Dress, Felt Hats, 1 Pr [pair] Boots. Working very late.*

---

<sup>146</sup> Directed by John Ford and starring Richard Green (Robin Hood in the later TV series). The screenplay was contributed to by Nobel Prize winning novelist William Faulkner. The Pall Mall was one of two cinemas located within Maadi Camp

<sup>147</sup> The Reverend W.H. Stych, vicar of Henderson, had officiated at Wally's and Eva Roberts' wedding the previous February (New Zealand Herald, 1940, 16 March, p. 1)

<sup>148</sup> Operation Battleaxe began

### **Monday 16th June**

*Draft to move at 0700 hrs. Approximately 1000 ORs to 18th & 21st.*

*Hours Returning stores from Area T.*

*Transferred from D to B Coy.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Tuesday 17th June**

*Closed Area T QM Stores. Returned to 31st Bn, L Area.*

*Home in evening.*

*Shared cubicle with:*

*2 Lts Catran*

*Taft.<sup>149</sup>*

### **Wednesday 18th June**

*Transferred from B Coy to Bn HQ. Transferred from Bn HQ to TS*

*[Training School?] Coy. Attending course on 2 in. mortar.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Thursday 19th June**

*Course on 3" Mortar all morning. Received notice of Course of ME [Middle East] School of Hygiene, Sarafand,<sup>150</sup> Palestine (Holy Land).*

*Packing and discarding gear all afternoon.*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Friday 20th June**

*Course on Thompson Sub-Machine Gun .450 ins in morning. Completed packing and left for Cairo Main Station at 1600 hrs. Met Pte Jack Hunter — my Batman at Papakura.<sup>151</sup> Left Maadi 1600 hrs. Cairo 1830. Arrived Kantara at 2300 hrs. Crossed Canal on Barge. Left Kantara W [East?] at 0030 hrs.*

### **Interlude in Palestine**

### **Saturday 21st June**

*Left Kantara W [East?] at 0030 hrs. Crossed Frontier Egypt Palestine at 0600 hrs (approx.). Arrived Lydda<sup>152</sup> at 0930 hrs. Arrived Transit*

*Camp 1130 hrs. Arrived Sarafand Camp at 1200 hrs. Posted to Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps Mess. Quartered with RAMC [Royal Army Medical Corps].*

### **Sunday 22nd June**

*Made a tour of Sarafand Imperial Army Camp. Very extensive. Great Shopping Centre and Theatre.*

*Room in Evening.*

*Wrote to Eva & Mum & Dad.*

### **Monday 23rd June**

*Commenced Course on Hygiene & Sanitation. Seems as if it may be very interesting.*

*Movies in Evening at Garrison Theatre.*

### **Tuesday 24th June**

*Continued Course. Very interesting.*

*Theatre in Evening.*

### **Wednesday 25th June**

*Hygiene Course all day.*

*Room in Evening.*

*Writing up notes.*

### **Thursday 26th June**

*Course all day.*

*(Hygiene).*

*Home in Evening.*

*Writing up notes.*

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<sup>149</sup> Probably 2nd Lieutenant (later Lieutenant) Bertie Catran of the NZ 21st Battalion who arrived in Egypt with the Infantry Reinforcements and was killed on Miteiriya Ridge during the 2nd Battle of El Alamein. Lieutenant Taft is unidentified. Wally spelled Catran, "Cattran"

<sup>150</sup> Sarafand Camp, to the southeast of Tel Aviv

<sup>151</sup> Private Jack Hunter of the NZ 21st Battalion

<sup>152</sup> Modern Lod

**Friday 27th June**

*Hygiene course all Day*

*Theatre in Evening.*

**Saturday 28th June**

*Classes in Morning.*

---

*Left Sarafand at 1400 hrs in RASC [Royal Army Service Corps] Truck for Jerusalem. Very interesting drive. Booked in at Eden Hotel.<sup>153</sup> Went for walk and bought films for Double-8 [cine] camera. Returned to Hotel for dinner and remained in lounge till bedtime.*

**Sunday 29th June**

*Engaged Guide & Taxi & went to Bethlehem — Mt Scopus, Mount of Olives — Saw R. Jordan — Dead Sea. Toured old Jerusalem & saw almost everything possible in a day.<sup>154</sup> Left by taxi on return to Sarafand. Back at 2000 hrs. Went to Garrison Cinema Café for tea & then home to write to Dear Eva.*

**Monday 30th June**

*Work at Hygiene School.*

*Writing to Eva in evening.*

*Bed early.*

*[Advertisement for the Eden Hotel pasted across the diary pages for the 30th June & 1st July] (Figure 30)*

**JULY**

**Tuesday 1st July**

*Classes all day.*

*Went into Tel Aviv. Left Sarafand at 1700 hrs. Returned by taxi at 2230 hrs. Very modern, interesting & costly city. Beautiful Surf beaches. Air raid — German POW Killed.*

---

<sup>153</sup> A notable (1938) modernist hotel located in Ben Yehuda Street (Ohad Smith, 2010)

<sup>154</sup> Even in 1941, this was an lot to see in one day

## Wednesday 2nd

### Moonlight.

Classes all day. Bed early & reading. Air Raid at 2300 hrs. 4 Bombs. "All Clear" after  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours.

Back to Bed.

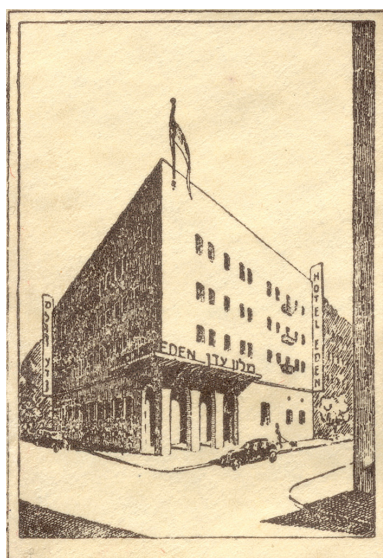
## Thursday 3rd July

Left Sarafand at 0800 hrs. Via Ramallah & to Nethenya [Netanya].

Bathed in Mediterranean Sea for 2 hours. Good Surf and really splendid

Figure 30

Advertisement for the Eden Hotel  
pasted into Wally's diary



beach. Lunched at Eden Hotel (Costly). Returned via Lydda to Sarafand.

Doing Hygiene notes in evening.

## Friday 4th July

Examination in Hygiene. 0900 hrs. Very good paper. Finished 1030 hrs. Free for rest of day.

Packing gear ready to leave tomorrow.

Pictures in Evening.

### **Saturday 5th July**

*Left Sarafand 0900 hrs.*

*Left Lydda 1100 hrs. Arrived Gaza 1300 hrs. Left Gaza 1340 hrs. Arrived Kantara E 1845 hrs. Passed Customs & [barrier?] & crossed Canal at 1930 hrs. Left Kantara W 2100 hrs. Arrived Cairo 0200 hrs 6/7/41.*

*Noted orange trees always planted in pairs. Saw large batch of POW[s] arrive at Lydda Sta.: Vichy French, Italians, Germans, Foreign Legion & numerous different native units (French).*

### **Cairo**

Cairo in 1941 was a city of many parts—the wealthy Upper Class Egyptian; the aloof Staff of British Troops in Egypt and Middle East Command;<sup>155</sup> the urban poor; the Durrell-Manning circle of exile writers; the squaddie seeing the sites, watching *Gone with the Wind* at the Metro and slumming it in the Berka; the well-connected young officer luxuriating at Groppi's or Shepheard's Hotel; the German spy and intriguing nationalist (notably Egypt's later President Anwar Sadat).<sup>156</sup> Unsurprisingly Wally, a Middle Class New Zealander, connected with none of these. With time, however, he found his own Cairo, and formed his own group of acquaintances. He saw the sites but added to these the churches of the city. His diary records visits to Groppi's and Shepheard's Hotel but he favoured the city's New Zealand Forces Club. He also became a regular visitor to the Mouski bazaar (usually spelt Mousky in the diary). For friends he turned to his fellow New Zealanders, other junior administrative officers, and—ultimately—a small group of Middle Class Egyptians.

To the diary's previously established themes, this period adds shopping, photography, the cinema and his health, which as a personal preoccupation henceforth equals his preoccupation with the weather. (Wally was something of a whiner). It also sees his introduction to the NZGREU. In September, he received official notification of his new role, met his new Officer in Command, Sydney Josland, and was

interviewed by the IWGC men then in charge of graves registration in the Middle East, fellow New Zealander Brigadier Herbert Hart,<sup>157</sup> and Major George Peek,<sup>158</sup> who outlined for him the nature of the work he was to undertake. The diary is frustratingly short on detail, but for officers it appears that there was to be no additional training. The men for the new unit were “marched in”, and after some frustrating toing-and-froing, the unit was equipped, its new lorries serviced, and the men trained in the use of the prismatic compass and exercised successfully in the Eastern Desert above Maadi. After this the NZGREU was ready to go.

### **Sunday 6th July**

*Arrived Cairo Main Station at 0200 hrs. — Arrived Maadi at 0300 hrs.  
Slept till 1000 hrs. Reported to Adjutant. Given day off.  
Cubicle in Evening writing Home.*

### **Monday 7th July**

*Writing all day.  
Good Siesta in afternoon.*

### **Tuesday 8th July**

*Writing to Eva & Rev. Stych. Up to see CO Hygiene Sect. [Section] re. job — no luck. Just loafing — Reading & Writing all day.  
Writing in Evening.*

*0222 hrs Cranswick<sup>159</sup> arrived from England via Durban.*

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<sup>155</sup> The pre-war and wartime British Army Commands in the country. During the desert campaign, British Troops in Egypt (BTE), remained independent of Middle East Command, functioning primarily as a logistics and training base

<sup>156</sup> Cooper, 1989

<sup>157</sup> Brigadier Herbert Hart headed the IWGC's operations in the Middle East and from 1940 was unpaid Assistant Director of Graves Registration and Enquiries Middle East Forces (Crawford, 2020, p. 68; Longworth 2010, p. 177)

<sup>158</sup> George Peek had been responsible for finding, registering and concentrating war graves and completing the layout of cemeteries in Iraq during the early 1920s (Longworth, 2010, pp. 115–16, 177). A later report describes him as lazy, worn-out and unpopular (Fraser, 1944b)

<sup>159</sup> Lieutenant James Cranswick of the NZ 21st Battalion





Figure 31  
Free map of central Cairo published in the WW2 Services Guide to the city



**Wednesday 9th July***Writing & Reading.**Home in Evening.***Thursday 10th July***Writing & Reading all day.**CO received report from CO, 5th Field Hygiene Section, ME, Sarafand.**Self "Showed Outstanding Knowledge of his Subject."**Home in Evening.***Friday 11th July***Reading.**Attended lecture by Brigadier Miles.<sup>160</sup> "Greek Campaign".**Helwan Hospital in afternoon with Jim Cranswick. Saw Les Reanney<sup>161</sup> & several others in Hospital.**Back to Camp.**Home in Evening.***Saturday 12th July***Reading & Writing all morning. Siesta during Afternoon.**Home in Evening.***Sunday 13th July***Pres. [Presbyterian] Communion Service at YMCA — Rev McDowall<sup>162</sup> (Major).**Town after lunch with Jim Cranswick. Spent afternoon in Bazaars.**Tea at Café "Pole Nord".<sup>163</sup>**Drink at "Groppi's".<sup>164</sup>**Back to Camp Early.*


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<sup>160</sup> Brigadier Reginald Miles. Miles, commander of 2NZEF Divisional Artillery, was captured during Operation Crusader. Inexplicably he committed suicide after escaping from an Italian POW Camp with James Hargest

<sup>161</sup> Captain (later Major) Leslie Reanney of the NZ 21st Battalion

<sup>162</sup> Reverend Robert McDowall, also captured during Operation Crusader

<sup>163</sup> On Sharia Tallaat Harb (formerly Soliman Pasha)

<sup>164</sup> Rommel is alleged to have said "I will drink tea in Groppi" (Al-Youm, 2021)

### **Monday 14th July**

*Paraded at 0800 hrs for details of Tactical Scheme in Desert.*

*Drew Rifle.*

*Maadi with laundry & Film in afternoon. Visited Mosque and climbed minaret.*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Tuesday 15th July**

*Very solid march out across desert. Left 0500 hrs. Arrived 1000 hrs (14 miles).*

*Established Bivouac — Siesta in afternoon. Night operations. "Stand To" 2015–2115 hrs.*

### **Wednesday 16th July**

*"Stand To" — 0430–0530 hrs.*

*2015–2115 hrs.*

*Shooting with Rifles, Brens, 2" Mortar & AT [anti-tank] Rifle.*

*Exceedingly hot during day. Very Cold at night & very heavy dew.*

### **Thursday 17th July**

*Ditto.*

*Water 1 Gallon per day.*

*2 qts for consumption.*

### **Friday 18th July**

*Reveille 0400 hrs.*

*Left 0500 hrs. Marched to Maadi—Arrived back 0915 hrs.*

*Bed Early.*

### **Saturday 19th July**

*Writing in morning.*

*Cairo in afternoon. Bracelet for Eva (Silver. Filigree). In Bazaars. Camp at 2000 hrs.*

### **Sunday 20th July**

*Church Parade at 0815 hrs. Resting & Writing. Cairo with Carl — Dinner*

*at Le Café Française. Special Farewell Dinner. Helwan with Carl.  
Home at 2359 hrs.*

### **Monday 21st July**

*All Day at Weapon Training School. Maadi to collect Photos.*

### **Tuesday 22nd July**

*Weapon Training School.*

*Camp in afternoon & Evening.*

### **Wednesday 23rd July**

*Weapon Training School. Bren. LMG.*

*Perry<sup>165</sup> commenced as Batman.*

### **Thursday 24th July**

*Treatment for Ingrown Toe Nail. (Painful).*

*Weapon Training (1 hr).*

*Rest of Day Free.*

### **Friday 25th July**

*Weapon Training.*

### **Saturday 26th July**

*Internal Economy at Weapon Training School.*

*Cairo after lunch. Shopping. Tea at "Club".*

*Home at 2030 hrs.*

### **Sunday 27th July**

*Pres. Service at YMCA Major Rev. McDowall.*

*Communion Later.*

*Easy Day.*

### **Monday 28th July**

*On duty as OC Bath Picquet at 2NZE Bath, Maadi, from 1100 hrs till  
2045 hrs.*

---

<sup>165</sup> Private Reginald Perry of the NZ 21st Battalion

**Tuesday 29th July**

*Preparing notes for Lecture to be delivered to Incoming Draft 6th Reifs.  
Home in Evening.*

**Wednesday 30th July**

*Typing full text of Lecture for Reifs Draft.*

*Men marched in at 1530 hrs.*

*Formal Mess.*

*Meeting of Mess. Elected to Mess Comm. [Committee] as TS Coy Representative.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Thursday 31st July**

*Busy on various Unit jobs*

*Home in evening.*

**AUGUST**

**Friday 1st August**

*Lecturing to new Draft by Coys. Hygiene & Sanitation.*

*Pay.*

*Mess Comm. Meeting all afternoon.*

*Helwan to Kodak & to Club.*

**Saturday 2nd August**

*Cairo with Mess Sgt Barnes*

*to buy for Mess Dinner (used Lt Thorley's Car).*

*Home in Evening.*

**Sunday 3rd August**

*Bn Ord. [Orderly] Officer.*

*Air Raid — Heliopolis (?).*

**Monday 4th August**

*Writing to Eva.*

*Attended Court of Enquiry re. damage to Safe at Base Sigs [Signals],  
Maadi.*

[NZ Death notice for 31 year old Cora Williams pasted into diary]

## **Tuesday 5th August**

*Various bits of attention to Mess.*

*Cairo to collect Paper Serviettes, Tooth Picks, etc.*

*Helwan for Photos.*

## **Wednesday 6th August**

*Conclusion of Court of Enquiry re. Sigs Safe.*

*(Lieut. A.W. Brown responsible).<sup>166</sup>*

*Regt. [Regimental] Guest Night. Dinner went off very well indeed.*

*Enjoyable evening.*

## **Thursday 7th August**

*Taking things Easy during day. Slight case of Gyppo Tummy.*

*Home in Evening.*

## **Friday 8th August**

*Left at 0500 & went to Cairo City market to buy fruit and Negs [film negatives]. Most interesting morning — markets very good — but the filth & Stench (?).*

*Home in Evening.*

## **Saturday 9th August**

*Committee work.*

*Cairo in afternoon.*

*Home at 2030.*

## **Sunday 10th August**

*Church Parade.*

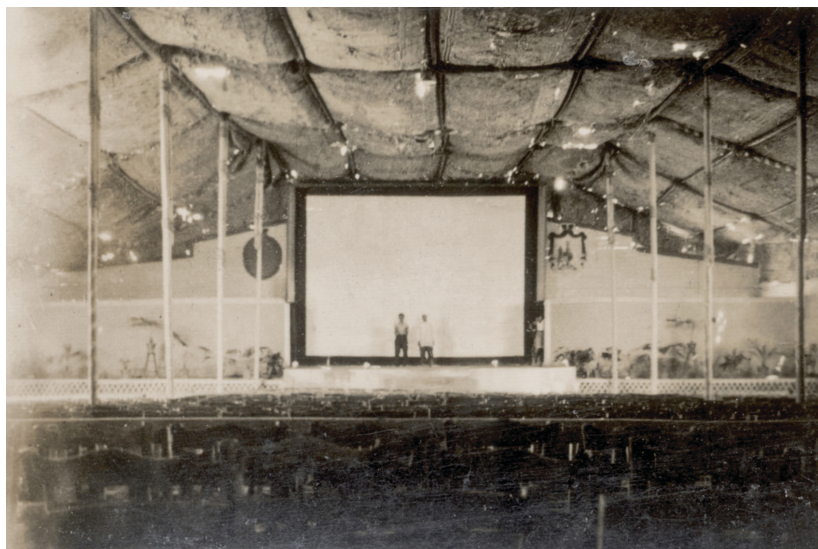
*Easy Day all Day.*

## **Monday 11th August**

*Mess Committee work.*

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<sup>166</sup> WWI veteran Lieutenant A.W. Brown, MC, DCM, OC of the Base Signal Company at Maadi Camp (see Borman, 1954, p. 71)



**Figure 32**

The interior of Shafto's cinema, Maadi Camp (photo: soldier Weymouth, NZ 18th Battalion)

### **Tuesday 12th August**

*Mess Committee work.*

*Movies in Evening at Shafto's Cinema (Figure 32).<sup>167</sup>*

### **Wednesday 13th August**

*Mess work in morning & Evening.*

### **Thursday 14th August**

*Doing Mess Accounts.*

*Checking Hassan Bakr Allam's a/les [accrued expenditures?].*

*Bar & Supper duty in Evening.*

*City markets at 0500 hrs.*

### **Friday 15th August**

*Pay Day.*

*Various Mess duties.*

*Town in evening.  
Home by 2100 hrs.*

**Saturday 16th August**

*In Camp all day.*

**Sunday 17th August**

*Camp all day.*

*Church Parade in am.*

**Monday 18th August**

*Camp & Mess duties.*

*Helwan & back in afternoon.*

**Tuesday 19th August**

*Coy Duties.*

**Wednesday 20th August**

*Coy & Mess duties — Bn Route March 1900 hours–2300 hrs.*

**Thursday 21st August**

*Coy Duties.*

**Friday 22nd August**

*Pay Day.*

*Usual Coy Duties.*

*Town in afternoon.*

*Home by 2300 hrs.*

**Saturday 23rd August**

*In Camp all day & Home in the evening.*

**Sunday 24th August**

*Church Parade.*

---

<sup>167</sup> Shafto's was one of two cinemas in Maadi Camp. It was known for being cheap, ramshackle, with a ceiling made out of sackcloth, and out-of-date (Hedley, 2009, pp. 39–40)

*Carl Ferguson turned up at 1530 hrs. Carl & Self — to Helwan Hospital to see Col. Mackay [Macky].*

**Monday 25th August**

*“Captain of Week” from today.*

*Into Cairo on Mess affairs — back 1400 hours. Camp visited by Greek Colonel.*

*Letter writing in evening.*

**Tuesday 26th August**

*Camp Duties during morning.*

*Paid official visit to Helmieh, No 3 NZ Gen. Hospital [NZGH] — away all the afternoon.*

**Wednesday 27th August**

*Mess Business & Coy Orderly Room.*

**Thursday 28th August**

*Company Work.*

**Friday 29th August**

*Pay Parade for Coy. Details.*

*Home in evening.*

**Saturday 30th August**

*Cairo all day on Mess Business.*

*Home at 2030 hrs.*

**Sunday 31st August**

*Church Parade.*

*Easy remainder of day.*

**SEPTEMBER**

**Monday 1st September**

*Cairo on Mess business.*



## **Tuesday 2nd September**

*Coy Orderly Room & Mess.*

*A bit "Off Colour".*

## **Wednesday 3rd September**

*Cairo on Mess Business.*

*"Guest Night".*

*German Air Raid nearby. About 9 bombs dropped.*

## **Thursday 4th September**

*Orderly Room in morning.*

*Rest in afternoon. "Off Colour".*

*Lots of mail in.*

*Aerial Activity tonight.*

## **Friday 5th September**

*Paid Company.*

*Cairo in afternoon. Visit to Musky [Mouski] Bazaar (Figure 33). Bought set of Nightie, Slip & Panties for my Love. Tea at NZ Club (Figure 34) & then out to Helwan. Air Raids (2) on Cairo. Trains slowed up. No Lights.*

*Home at 2330 hrs.*

## **Saturday 6th September**

*Mess duties all morning. Free in afternoon. Meeting of Mess & new Committee Elected. Siesta & writing letters.*

*Nights getting much cooler.*

*Quite chilly in the mornings.*

## **Sunday 7th September**

*Church.*

*Mess Work.*

*Good Siesta all afternoon.*

*Letter writing in evening.*

*Bed Early.*



**Figure 33**  
Mouski Bazaar (photo: Leonard Brigstock)

### **Monday 8th September**

*Coy & Mess Duties all am.*

*Mess meeting at 1330 and was returned to Committee again — Mess officer.*

*Pictures at Pall Mall in evening — “Crime of Doctor Forbes”.<sup>168</sup>*

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*2 x Ju. 88 shot down over Canal zone by Beaufighters.*

### **Tuesday 9th September**

*Working in Mess.*

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*Siesta in afternoon.*

*Home in Evening.*

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<sup>168</sup> 1936 American thriller directed by George Marshall



**Figure 34**

The New Zealand Forces Club (photo: unknown)

### **Wednesday 10th September**

*Mess & Bar Work all morning.*

*Wrote letters in afternoon. Received 1st Airgraph<sup>169</sup> letter from Topsy & Jack.*

*NZ Air Mail arrived — (Late).*

*Writing in Evening*

### **Thursday 11th September**

*Mess work & assisted Noel Gardner [Gardiner]<sup>170</sup> to check & cancel Bar chits for 10/9/42.*

<sup>169</sup> A microfilmed letter or postcard printed at destination, intended to reduce the weight of mail carried by air to and from theatre

<sup>170</sup> Lieutenant (later Captain) Noel Gardiner of the NZ 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion. Gardiner was awarded the DSO for gallantry on Miteiriya Ridge during the second battle of El Alamein

*General Freyberg visited mess for drinks & met all Officers.  
Today I received notification of posting to "NZ War Graves Registration  
& Enquiry Unit."  
Home in Evening.*

### **Friday 12th September**

*Working in Mess. Helped with Coy Pay Parade.  
Went into Cairo at 1530 hrs — Visited Mouski Bazaar — Present[s] for  
Eva, Mam, Winnie & Wee Joy.  
Home by 2100 hrs.*

### **Saturday 13th September**

*Mess work.  
Siesta in afternoon.  
Carl Ferguson & Allan Yeoman<sup>171</sup> arrive on 7-Days Leave.  
Slept night in my cubicle.*

[NZ Death notice for 64 year old William Hart pasted into diary]

### **Sunday 14th September**

*Busy all day with various mess Duties & Letter writing.  
Carl & Allan out but back for night.*

### **Monday 15th September**

*Mess Duties.  
Carl and Allan Left for City.  
Siesta 1400–1500 hrs. Into Cairo. Shopping — Dinner at NZ Club with  
Carl — Carl & I to "Metro" Theatre (Figure 35) to see "Waterloo  
Bridge".<sup>172</sup> Great Show.*

N.B. Went down to Base Reception Depot & saw Capt. Josland.

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<sup>171</sup> Captain Allan Yeoman of the NZ 21st Battalion, captured at Sid Rezegh

<sup>172</sup> Located on Sharia Talaat Harb (formerly Soliman Pasha), a still extant Art Deco cinema built in 1940, the Metro showcased MGM movies (Dadrian, 2011) — including its remake of Waterloo Bridge, starring Vivien Leigh and Robert Taylor



**Figure 35**

The Metro cinema (photo: Wilfred Sale)

*Discussed establishment of new Unit. R. Perry to be my Batman-Diver.  
Home at 0030 hrs. Clocks back 1 hr.*

**Tuesday 16th September**

*Egyptian Summer Time Ends at 0100 hrs. Clocks back 1 hour.*

*Routine work all day.*

*Home.*

**Wednesday 17th September**

*Routine Mess Work.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Thursday 18th September**

*Abbassia to Interview Brig. Col. [sic] Hart & Major Peek, War Graves  
Registration & Enquiries Unit [GRE]. Tour of offices & explanation of  
work to be undertaken.*

*Home in Evening.*



**Figure 36**

Cairo War Cemetery (photo: Walter von Schramm)

### **Friday 19th September**

*0200–0300 hrs Picquet duty in Area T.*

*Pay Parade & then into town with Tom Owen. Visited Mouski. Dinner at Club — Carl & Allan Yeoman. Helwan to see “Kodak” & Ladies at Club. Home 2359 hrs.*

### **Saturday 20th September**

*Interview with Military Secretary.<sup>173</sup>*

*Marched into Base reception Camp to join NZ War Graves Registration & Enquiries Unit [NZGREU or NZ GRU].*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Sunday 21st September**

*Church Parade.*

*Siesta.*

*Movies to see “A Star is Born”.*



**Monday 22nd September**

*Men for NZGREU marched in today.*

*Took men for Route March & Swim at Maadi Camp Baths.*

*Home in Evening. Tom Owen left for Mersa Matruh at 2200 hrs.*

**Tuesday 23rd September**

*Instructing men of Unit in use of Liquid Prismatic Compass. Home in Evening.*

*Writing Home.*

*Visited Cairo British Military Cemetery in am with Unit (Figure 36).*

**Wednesday 24th September**

*Proceeded to HQ GRE at Abbassia — checking over maps necessary for operation on North African Coast.*

*Kidney Chill — Back pains very bad.*

*Bed at 1900 hrs.*

**Thursday 25th September**

*In bed all day with flu. Chill in kidneys. Pains in small of back very bad.*

*Pay book returned with crdt [credit]. Balance as at 19/9/41 of £S 5-14-0.<sup>174</sup>*

*Day seems interminable.*

**Friday 26th September**

*Pay Day. Drew £E 8.*

*Bed all day. Back very bad.*

*Perry on Leave.*

**Saturday 27th September**

*Bed all day.*

*No improvement in back ache.*

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<sup>173</sup> The Military Secretary was responsible for personnel movements, promotions and awards, etc. (Stevens, 1958, p. 198). At this date the post was filled by Colonel Sir Stephen Allen.

<sup>174</sup> Pounds Stirling as opposed to Egyptian Pounds



**Figure 37**

Bustling Cairo — the Midan Opera or Opera Square (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

*Head a bit feverish.*

*Perhaps it is working up & out (?)*

**Sunday 28th September**

Air Mail (3).

Bed.

*Very slight improvement.*

*No mail — Disappointment.*

*Saw Giant “Liberator” Plane — 4 Engined Biplane [sic] — Land machine — Largest in World — Outward Bound to USA. Well-marked with “Stars & Stripes” & US ARMY.*

**Monday 29th September**

*Air Mail (1).*

*Surface Mail (3).*



*Much Better.*

*Bed All day. — Tired of all this idleness.*

*Lt Tom Owen returned from El Bagush [Baggush].<sup>175</sup>*

## **Tuesday 30th September**

*Quite a lot better but still in Bed. Slight back ache at times. Air very chilly today. Think I'll risk a little exercise & go to Mess for meals. Up about 1100 hrs. Lunch at Mess. Walked to Naafi & YMCA. Hair Cut. — Hot Shower. Dinner at Mess.*

*Bed Early.*

## **OCTOBER**

### **Wednesday 1st October**

*Up today. Lot better — Back sore. Working in Orderly Room all morning. Resting in afternoon.*

*Bed Early. Restless night.*

### **Thursday 2nd October**

*Abbassia to check maps required & then to BTE [British Troops in Egypt] to get same. Collected few only.*

*Spent day in town shopping, etc. (Figure 37). Home early & Bed early.*

*Properly "Done in".*

### **Friday 3rd October**

*Out to Flat Hill with Unit for map & Compass training.*

*Back to Camp 1000 hrs.*

*BTE to collect balance of maps on Indent.*

*Siesta after lunch. Back rather sore. Home in Evening. Writing to Eva.*

*Uniform Allowance PT 487½.*

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<sup>175</sup> The Baggush Box, to the east of Mersa Matruh. British defence in the Western Desert was based on large, pre-prepared boxes with dugouts defended by minefields and wire

**Saturday 4th October**

*Interior Economy.*

*Town in afternoon — Window Shopping.*

*Tea at NZ Club.*

*Met the "Boys" by the score.*

*Home 2300 hrs.*

**Sunday 5th October**

*Unit Photograph taken.*

*Easy Day.*

**Monday 6th October**

*No transport available.*

*Constructed box for personal belongings.*

*Home in evening.*

**Tuesday 7th October**

*Captain Josland & Self to BTE. On to Abbassia. At Mapping Dept [Department].*

*Home for lunch. Siesta during afternoon.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Wednesday 8th October**

*Holiday today.*

*Boys to Maadi to watch cricket. Self to Maadi — Shopping.*

*Home in Evening — writing.*

*Back sore.*

**Thursday 9th October**

*Doing map tracing.*

*Back bad — saw Quack. Orders to report to Helwan Hospital tomorrow morning for fuller diagnosis.*

*Pictures at Shaftos.*

**Friday 10th October**

*Visit to Helwan Hospital in Ambulance for Medical Inspection. Case*

diagnosed as "Fibrocites" [fibrositis].

*Prescription — Heat — Massage — Exercise.*

*Rested all afternoon — Bed Early.*

### **Saturday 11th October**

*Interior Economy.*

*Routine Work.*

*Town in afternoon. Bought pair shoes — PT 69. Solid, high blocked toes — should be OK for ingrown toenail. Tea at Club.*

*Home by 1930 hrs.*

*Censored Mail — Bed.*

### **Sunday 12th October**

*Had a good sleep in this morning — back fairly sore.*

*Writing Letters & resting.*

—

*Bed Early.*

### **Monday 13th October**

*Pottering around in Orderly Room all morning — Reported to Hospital at 1345 — Heat Treatment — Infra Red Ray Lamp — Massage & Exercises.*

*Had heels and toeplates fitted to new shoes — PT 10.*

*Back to Camp.*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Tuesday 14th October**

*Overhauled V-8 Ford Truck Engine — (OK). Down to Maadi & return in truck. Hospital for treatment at 1400 hrs. Home again 1550. Mail Plane landed about 1600. Very much overdue. Home in Evening. Writing.*

### **Wednesday 15th October**

*Routine work all day.*

*Hospital 1345 hrs.*

*Home in evening.*

**Thursday 16th October**

*Odd jobs during day.*

*Hospital 1615 hrs.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Friday 17th October**

*Nothing doing in morning.*

*Reading and writing.*

*Pay Parade £3-10-0.*

*Hospital at 1615 hrs.*

*Home in evening.*

*Much Better.*

**Saturday 18th October**

*Owen & Party left for N Coast of Egypt.*

*Walked to Maadi with Capt. Josland. Visited Jewish Synagogue & St. John [the Baptist]'s Anglican Church.*

*Cairo after lunch to Mouski Bazaar. Left stick to have dog's head fitted.*

*Tea at Club. — Hot bath. Home at 2100. Writing to Eva.*

**Sunday 19th October**

*Doing Drafting work & writing to Eva & Mum & Dad.*

*7th Reifs arrived at 1730 hrs.*

*Home in evening — Bed early.*

**Monday 20th October**

*Doing darned all today. Hospital for treatment at 1615 hrs.*

*Home in Evening.*

**Tuesday 21st October**

*Hospital at 1000 hrs for treatment and examination. "Honourably discharged without a stain on his character".*

~~*Loafing in afternoon.*~~ [crossed out in diary]

*BTE for maps — Helmieh Hospital & Heliopolis.*

*Home in evening.*

**Wednesday 22nd October**

*Left Cairo Main Stn at 0715. Arrived Tel El Kebir at 0930. Arrived at no 5 BOD [Base Ordinance Depot] at 1545. Took over 3 x 4 wheel, 1 ton, V-8 Ford, non-Desert trucks (Drivers: Perry, Baverstock,<sup>175</sup> McLeary).<sup>176</sup> Left BOD at 1305 — arrived BRD [Base Reception Depot] at 1435 hrs. Via Ismailia Canal Rd.*

*Home in evening.*

**Thursday 23rd October**

*Sent my truck & Lt Owen's to LAD [Light Aid Detachment]<sup>178</sup> for "check over" & registration & attention to "blackout" of lights. Trip to Nile wharves near Les Grands Moulins d'Egypt — Photographs of Feluccas.*

*Lunch in Camp.*

*Visited Base PO & Cathedral Church of All Saints, Cairo (Figure 38).<sup>179</sup>*

*Home in Evening.*

**Friday 24th October**

*Routine work all day.*

*Home in evening.*

**Saturday 25th October**

*Visited Cairo Military Cemetery & Shopping in Cairo*

*Met Noel Gardner [Gardiner].*

*Home in evening.*

**Sunday 26th October**

*Quiet Day. Visited NIT [?] Depot.*

*Mess in evening.*

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<sup>176</sup> Private Tom Baverstock of the Infantry Reinforcements

<sup>177</sup> Harold McLeary of the NZ Army Service Corps

<sup>178</sup> A Light Aid Detachment was responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of unit equipment

<sup>179</sup> Designed in the Art Deco style by Adrian Gilbert-Scott (brother of Giles), All Saints was consecrated in 1938. It was demolished in 1970 to make way for the Corniche el Nil (Cooper, 1989, p. 36; Gilbert Scott, 2018)



**Figure 38**  
All Saints Cathedral in  
Bulaq, Cairo (photo:  
Leonard Brigstock)

**Monday 27th October**

*Masara<sup>180</sup> to collect 4000 Rns [rounds] SAA [small arms ammunition] (Bandoliers).*

*Helwan for morning tea. Visited St Paul's Ang. [Anglican] Church (Figure 39) & Greek Orthodox Church.*

*Home in evening.*

**Tuesday 28th October**

*In Camp all day & evening.*

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<sup>180</sup> On the Nile between Maadi and Helwan. The Tura quarries there were used to store munitions



**Figure 39**

St Paul's Anglican Church, Helwan (today the Evangelical Church) (photo: Leonard Brigstock)

### **Wednesday 29th October**

*Three trucks did strict manoeuvre — (8 VPM) (20 MPH). Route up Wadi Tigh & return — 35 miles. Trucks behaved very well in all types of very hard going.*

### **Thursday 30th October**

*Visit to HQ, GREU, at Abbassia. Saw Major Peek.  
Home in evening.*

### **Friday 31st October**

*Home all day & evening.*

## **NOVEMBER**

### **Saturday 1st November**

*Town after lunch in "Zebra". Collected stick with Dog's Head & NZ*

*Maori Brooch from Mouski Bazaar.*

### **Sunday 2nd November**

*Butcher & Self to Ben el Yusef [Bahr Yussef?] via Mena. 3 hours. Photo taking. Home in evening.*

### **Monday 3rd November**

*Routine work with unit.*

*Home in Evening.*

### **Tuesday 4th November**

*Abbassia to meet Brig. Sir? Hart.*

*Received preliminary instructions re. going out into "Blue".*

*Home in evening.*

### **Wednesday 5th**

*Took over control of all vehicles of NZGREU. Collating Vouchers, etc.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Thursday 6th November**

*Went to DADOS & collected 1 tin of Brown Camouflage Dye.*

*Camouflaged tent Flies & stencilled Ration Boxes. Div. [Divisional] School for a jolly, hot shower.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Friday 7th November**

*Sorting all our belongings into three loads for trucks ready for departure Monday.*

*Home in evening.*

### **Saturday 8th November**

*Sorting Stores.*

*Left for Cairo at 1100 hrs. Shopping all day.*

*Left Cairo 1800 hrs.*

*Home in Evening.*



**Sunday 9th November***Packing for Field & Kit Store (Base).**Movement order at 1940 hrs.**Working — loading kit nos 2 & 3 trucks.**Bed at 0130 hrs 10/11/41.****Into the Blue***

By November 1941, Rommel had over-extended his army and the allies, with twice the resources, were ready for a full-scale offensive. This operation—Operation Crusader—was partially successful, but it was a tactical failure, victory coming at a huge cost in both in men and matériel. Wally's new unit, only recently deployed, was present throughout, albeit at some distance behind the lines. It commenced its work in Egypt, registering the graves of those who had died during the campaigns of 1940, the victims of air raids, and the recent wounded who had been evacuated and died behind the front. Soon, however, it was across the Libyan border scouring the desert for those who had died on the recent front line(s).

Despite Wally's new job, the tone of his diary and its wider themes remained largely unchanged. It is filled with details of journeys undertaken, air raids, scavenging expeditions, the weather, various ailments, some aspects of the unit's work, and rather more of the bureaucracy and logistics surrounding this. What it does not do, however, is acknowledge any personal response to death or the dead, a lack of reflection that surely made that aspect of the job easier.

Particularly striking in these early entries is his depiction of the desert in wintertime. This is impressed on us through repetition: rain, dust; rain, dust; rain, dust. These seem never ending, as they must have to him. Work continued, however, both in the field and at base, its pace similar to that back in Cairo, but now each day a physical trial. The desert comes over, not as unspoiled, but busy, scarred and litter strewn, and Wally's war in it, not as the caricature of punctuated activity about which we so often read, but as an

all-encompassing and uninterrupted tyranny of environmental hardship and logistical bureaucracy.

### **Monday 10th November**

*Left Maadi Base Reception at 0730 hrs after delivering Kit to Base Kit Store. Via Nile Rd, Mena Rd & Alex. Rd to Amiriya. Arrived at A at 1330 hrs. Stayed overnight at Transit Camp, Amiriya.*

### **Tuesday 11th November**

*Departed Amiriya at 0715 hrs. Arrived 8th Army Advanced HQ<sup>181</sup> at 1600 hrs. Reported to GRU HQ.*

*Digging in.*

*Note: All 8th Army, HQ Offices, Messes & Cookhouses, Latrines, etc., well underground in beautiful dugouts.*

### **Wednesday 12th November**

*Took Cpl Hawkins (NZ) & Cpl Otto Spohrs (UDF) and went to Mersa Matruh (40 Kilos), to Brit. War Cemetery — Photographing Graves.*

*Arrived 8th Army HQ at 1615 hrs.*

*Called at No 2 NZ G. Hospital [NZGH] (?).*

*Bed Early — Very Tired.*

### **Thursday 13th November**

*Easy day. Erecting camouflage over ends of tents to obscure light at night. Raid by lone Ital. plane. Soon shot down by Tomahawks.*

### **Friday 14th November**

*Went to Advanced HQ, 8th Army, and collected maps necessary to locate War Cemeteries in Forward areas. Capt. Josland & self went down to coast and bathed feet in salt water. Very rugged rocks. Water crystal clear & very deep.*

*Very much impressed by displays of aerial might in W [Western] Desert.*

### **Saturday 15th November**

*Another trip to Advanced HQ, 8th Army, to collect large supply of new*

edition of maps of Cyrenaica & Libya. Took a trip to salvage dump & collected a pile of scrap canvas. Will be useful for floor mats in tents and for erecting shelters & wind breaks.

### **Sunday 16th November**

*A real lazy day today. Tried to have snooze in afternoon but the flies thought otherwise.*

### **Monday 17th November**

*Collecting salvage. Skipper [Josland] went to Mersa Matruh. Went for bathe but sea very rough so just had a good wash & lay in a rock pool.*

### **Tuesday 18th November<sup>182</sup>**

*Terrific rains in night.*

*Did Darn all during day.*

*Fine day & ground drying up slowly.*

*Wonder how long it will last?*

### **Wednesday 19th November**

*Very heavy rain during night.*

*Skipper & Capt. Nesbitt<sup>183</sup> left for Recce trip to 86 L of C [Line of Communication],<sup>184</sup> 13th & 30th Corps.*

*Administrative work around Camp.*

*Lt Owen & party returned from Daba at 1430.*

### **Thursday 20th November**

*Visited NZ LOB,<sup>185</sup> 5th Brigade. Saw Ralph Harding,<sup>186</sup> Jim Marshall<sup>187</sup>*

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<sup>181</sup> Inside the Baggush Box

<sup>182</sup> The start of Operation Crusader

<sup>183</sup> Of the South African Graves Registration Unit (SA, GRU)

<sup>184</sup> The LoC or Line of Communication was a system of communication within a theatre of operations along which troops, supplies, wounded, POWs etc. were passed. LoCs were divided into a series of area and sub-area commands (War Office, 1939, pp. xvii, 16–19). “86” was one of these

<sup>185</sup> LOB comprised a trained reserve “left out of battle” in case of emergencies (Cody, 1953, p. III, note 6)

<sup>186</sup> Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Ralph Harding



**Figure 40**

Heavy rain at Daba (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

*& several others of old 21st. Capt. Josland returned from Recce at 2030 hrs.*

*Rain (Figure 40).*

### **Friday 21st November**

*Went to Mersa Matruh to collect Series of "Frontier" maps — 3 x 7 [3 off 7?]. Grease for tracks. Returned Sidi Haneish<sup>188</sup> & completed loading V-8. Left for W Desert & Libyan Desert at 1400 hrs. Camped for night at 80 Kilo peg on Matruh–Sidi Barrani Road. Heavy Rain during night.*

*Good reports of war.*

### **Saturday 22nd November**

*Left 80 Kilo Post at 0730 hrs — to Barrani. Scenes of our "Push" last year — Hundreds of burnt out Ital. tanks (Figures 41 and 42), Trucks & cars. Left road & took to Libyan Desert — through to Bir Enba<sup>189</sup> —*

& on to 86 L of C & main CCS [Casualty Clearing Station].<sup>190</sup> Camped for night. Rain. News from SAAF Drome of terrific tank battle.<sup>191</sup>

### **Sunday 23rd November**

Prospecting for cemetery site. Located site already prepared with graves dug. Shifted camp to new site on cemetery area (**Figure 43**).

*Air raids nearby during night. Used graves as slit trenches.*

### **Monday 24th November**

Proceeded to Bir Enba via Piccadilly Circus cemetery. Found Bir Enba cemetery after a lot of trouble & cleared site & erected crosses & registered graves.

### **Tuesday 25th November**

Visited both Piccadilly & Bir Enba Cemeteries. Erected crosses & cleaned up both cemeteries. Air raid encountered while on return journey across RAF Drome. Several raids during night. Railhead<sup>192</sup> bombed & 60 Jerries killed when POW train was hit.

### **Wednesday 26th November**

Visited Railhead.

To FSD [Field Supply Depot] (29th) to collect rations.

<sup>187</sup> Lieutenant (later Captain) James Marshall, killed on Miteiriya Ridge (Cody, 1953, p. 202)

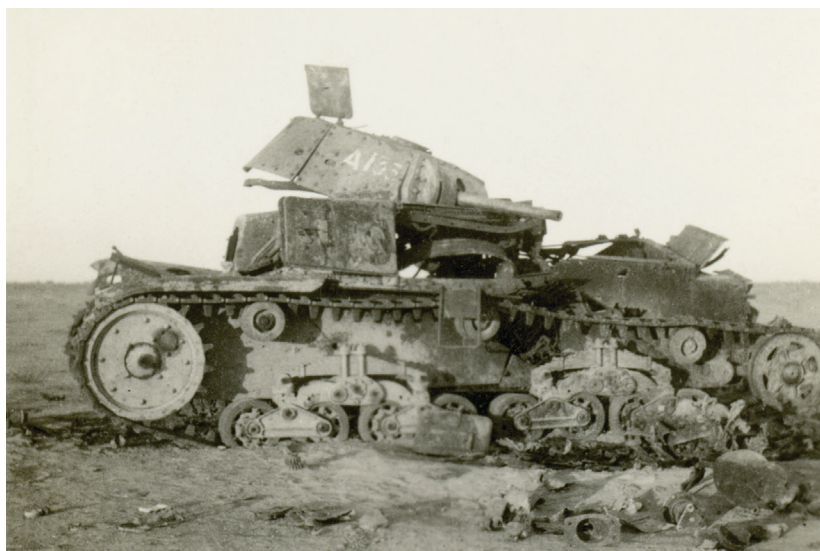
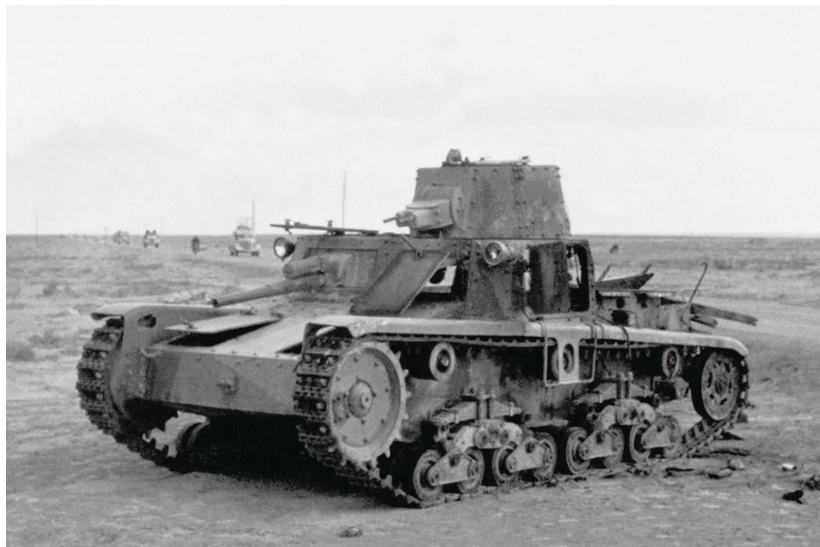
<sup>188</sup> Inside the Baggush Box

<sup>189</sup> Haqfet El Inhaba. In this diary entry, Wally spelled it "Bir Emba"; thereafter he spelled it "Bir Enba". For Western Desert locations see **Figures 54** and **58**

<sup>190</sup> The 14th (British) Casualty Clearing Station at Minqar el Zannan. The Army medical plan in the Western Desert was based on lines of evacuation from RAPs (Regimental Aid Posts), close to the front line, through ADSs and MDSs (Advanced and Main Dressing Stations), and CCSs (Casualty Clearing Stations), located at increasing distances from the front line, to GHs (General Hospitals) in the rear area. At different times Wally visited all of these

<sup>191</sup> The battle of Sidi Rezegh

<sup>192</sup> Misheifa. The Western Desert railway extension west from Mersa Matruh, constructed by the New Zealand Railway Group with the assistance of Indian sappers, reached Misheifa in early November, just prior to the commencement of Operation Crusader (Judd, 2003, chapter 13)



**Figures 41 and 42**  
Destroyed Italian tanks (photos: unknown and Lloyd Rodgers)

*Back to Camp at 1500 hrs.*

*Large convoys of wounded arriving at 14th CCS during night.*

### **Thursday 27th November**

*Reported to 8th Army Rear HQ. Then on to Piccadilly Circus Cemetery. Cross[ed] & registered 2 graves. Returned to Camp & prepared freehand plans of Bir Enba & Piccadilly Cemeteries. Heavy rain in afternoon. Collected a little water. Visited Capt. Nesbitt of SA [South African] GRU near escarpment near 14th CCS.*

### **Friday 28th November**

*Camp all day. Capt. Josland returned in evening with mail.*

*Heavy Raids (Air).*

### **Saturday 29th November**

*Spent morning trying to locate POW Pens. Returned to Camp. Out again in afternoon & saw Capt. Pape, interpreter, re. dead German POW. Erected 3 GRU Crosses on common grave & then returned to Camp after survey of cemetery site.*

### **Sunday 30th November**

*Easy day.*

*Two burials in Minqar el Zannan cemetery in afternoon.*

*1 Italian POW.*

*1 Indian Sepoy.*

*Very heavy raids all night.*

*Oil dump fired. 2 planes (G [German]) down. (Crew killed).*

*2 HAA [heavy anti-aircraft] Gunners killed & buried at El Zannan cemetery (1/12/41)*

## **DECEMBER**

### **Monday 1st December**

*Collecting Petrol & Rations.*

*took all morning.*



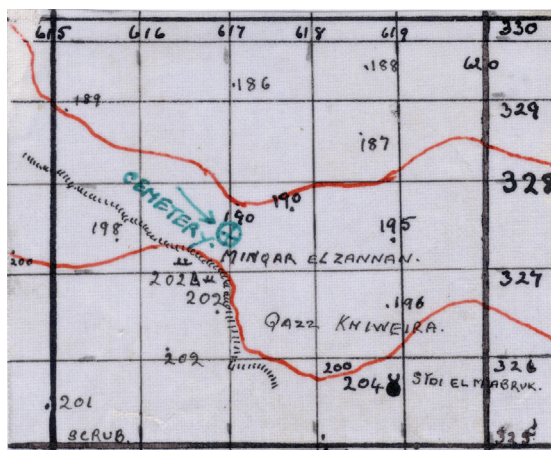


Figure 43  
Sketch map by Wally  
showing the location  
of Minqar el Zannan  
cemetery

2 AA gunners buried at camp in afternoon.  
Heavy raids at night.

### Tuesday 2nd December

Erected 12 crosses & 1 stake at Piccadilly Circus Cemetery. Dust storm followed by rain. Heavy rain — very overcast all night. No Jerry raids at all. RAF on job as usual.

### Wednesday 3rd December

Went to 48 FSD for rations & did not get back till late in afternoon. Stencilled crosses for several graves in El Zannan cemetery. Heavy raids all night — Getting a bit too close — Into the graves for a spell. Very cold. First frost of winter.

Had a hot bath(?)

### Thursday 4th December

Erected GRU Cross over Hun observer shot down near 76 landing ground. 3rd SA Wing. Reported to 86 L of C in afternoon re. party to dig graves. Jerries very busy again tonight.

Bitterly cold wind from SE.



*Sand lifting a good deal.*

*Plenty of Jerry planes but few bombs.*

## Friday 5th December

*Captain Josland left for El Baggush via 91 Kilo. Peg road (?)*

*Self to 14 CCS to collect working party of 8 AMPC (all nationalities — Czechs, Poles, Germans — Yugoslavs).<sup>193</sup>*

*Terrific sandstorm commenced at dusk last night & blew continuously for 24 hrs. All hands suffering from very sore eyes & severe headaches. Wind from SE — Changed to WSW by 1800 hrs. Wind dropped at dusk.*

## Saturday 6th December

Attended to various burials in El Zannan cemetery. Visit from Padre Naylor (Methodist from No 1 Mobile Hospital). Went to tea at Mobile Hospital Mess — Spent most enjoyable evening. Enjoyed a bottle ale.

## Sunday 7th December

Padre Naylor came across & held very memorable service for our Small Unit — Parable of "Prodigal Son". Skipper returned during afternoon. No mail.

*Terrific raids in vicinity between midnight & 0600 hrs.*

## Monday 8th December

*Bombs dropped very close. Closest bombs since I left England.*

*Japan takes offensive.*

USA & Britain, Holland, Latin States of S America declare war on Japan.

*Malaya invaded. Honolulu bombed — Shanghai & Hong Kong raided.*

Guam & Nauru bombed. ?

**Tuesday 9th December**

*In Camp all day. Cutting Stencils.*

*Had a good nights entertainment with Radio.*

<sup>193</sup> The only unit “enemy aliens” were allowed to serve in at this date was the Pioneer Corps, formerly the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC)

*Cold, Overcast night.*

*No Raids by Jerry.*

### **Wednesday 10th December**

*HMS Repulse & Prince of Wales sunk by Japs off Malaya.*

*Heavy Dust Storms & odd sudden & heavy showers in afternoon. Very strong winds & very cold.*

*No raids.*

### **Thursday 11th December**

*In camp all day.*

*Terrible Dust Storms all day.*

*No raids till 0500 hrs, but they sure dropped some eggs when they did get here. Big & plenty & plenty much close.*

### **Friday 12th December**

*Camp all day.*

*Dust still perseveres.*

*No raids.*

### **Saturday 13th December**

*Odd dust storms.*

*No raids. — Very cold.*

### **Sunday 14th December**

*Service by Padre Naylor of 1st Mobile Hospital. Jerry Recce Plane overhead at 1030 hrs. About 3000 ft. AA must have been asleep as they opened up too late. Shells burst about a mile behind plane. Went out to see crashed "Maryland" 5 miles away on escarpment.*

### **Monday 15th December**

*Heavy rain in early hours. Wind blowing strong gale but little dust owing to rain. Very cold today. Reg away for rations & water. Letter writing to England, NZ & SA.*

### **Tuesday 16th December**

*Visited 8th Army HQ to obtain location of HQ as from 17-12-41.*

Also saw Provost Marshall re. our route through “Wire” & positions of minefields — (very extensive).

Did washing with Persil.

Quiet night.

### **Wednesday 17th December**

Lazy Day

Packing for move on Saturday. Celebrated Xmas Day & had a memorable Xmas Dinner.

Writing till 2330 hrs.

### **Thursday 18th December**

Writing in morning.

Wish I could get stamps & cash.

### **Friday 19th December**

Went to 48 FSD to collect pay from Field Cashier. Back to Camp & Paid troops & sold goods from Canteen. Packed trucks ready for move to Bir Sidi Omar.

### **Saturday 20th December**

Started out on route for S. Omar. Had tyre trouble on No 2 Truck.

Via Bir Thalata to Bir Habata (Lunch here). On to Conference Cairn.

Experienced some of worst dust storms I have been through. Arrived at Conference Cairn & stayed at Ambulance Relay Station.

Slept in Ambulances tonight. Great rest.

### **Sunday 21st December**

Left for Sidi Omar via Bir Sheferzen. Travelled by ambulance route. Very dusty & sticky route. Had [a] few close shaves — nearly stuck in heavy dust at times. Streams of huge convoys, all moving up into Libya. Called at officers' clothing store near Sheferzen. Passed numerous German tanks & vehicles by the wayside. Onto Bir Sidi Omar Nuovo. Called at 2 Div. S African HQ. Then selected camp site south of Sidi Omar about 2 miles. Erected tents in Libya near 52 Cairn (**Figure 54**).

Quiet night.

### **Monday 22nd December**

*Consolidated Camp in morning. Went to Libyan Omar after lunch. Countless graves scattered all over desert. Looks as though we shall be here for quite a spell. Great news of campaign. Jerries well on run. We are only 25 miles from Benghazi.*

*Quiet night but very cold.*

### **Tuesday 23rd December**

*Branding crosses, for Libyan Omar. Lunch at 1130 hrs then to Libyan Omar. Worked there till 1630 hrs. Located 45 new graves. Some German & Italian grave plots contained numbers of mass burials — numbers of actual bodies cannot be ascertained.*

*Very cold night — extra blanket.*

*Bedding = Kapok sleeping bag,<sup>195</sup> 2 double blankets & a double rug & also canvas flap & still cold; still it must be much worse for lads in open up further.*

### **Wednesday 24th December<sup>196</sup>**

*In camp in morning.*

*Out on search & salvage & hunting souvenirs — covered many miles of desert.*

*Rum issue for Xmas Eve. Also 1 Bottle of Castlemaine, Aussie Beer.*

*Very cold.*

### **Thursday 25th December**

*Out all day. Souveniring & seeking graves. Found — 7 [huns?] — 5 R [Royal] Tank Corps & 2 Hun Airmen.*

*Owen away near Capuzzo.*

*Cold night.*

*Writing to my beloved. x x x.*

### **Friday 26th December**

*Out after graves all morning.*

*Cold night.*

**Saturday 27th December**

*Doing crosses for nearby graves.*

*Out to Gotha plane to erect crosses. Removed badly burnt body from plane & interred it alongside his comrade. Sent Reg Perry & Cpl B. Burt out to locate New graves. Heavy dust blow all day.*

*Night not quite so cold.*

**Sunday 28th December**

*Doing inscriptions on crosses.*

*Fitted very useful drawer beneath table.*

*Doing enlargements of map squares to pinpoint various isolated graves.*

*Very cold night.*

*'Chute flares dropping near Hellfire Pass.*

**Monday 29th December**

*In & about camp all day. Owen out on various petty jobs.*

*Terribly cold night. Worst to date.*

*Skipper arrived from Matruh.*

**Tuesday 30th December**

*In camp all day.*

*Cutting stencils, compiling GRU Returns & preparing crosses for erection.*

**Wednesday 31st December**

*Stencilling inscriptions on GRU Crosses all morning. Out to "crashed" Hurricane (Figure 44) & then touring around desert in search of "Loot". Home via Bir Omar Nuovo & Bir Ghirba.<sup>197</sup>*

*Located 6 Hun tanks — burnt out (Bodies inside).*

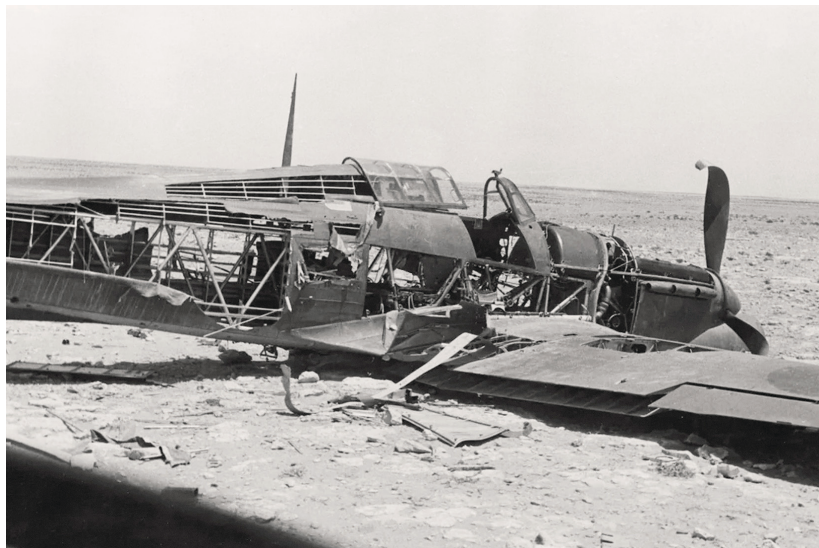
*Very cold night — quiet.*

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<sup>195</sup> Cotton-like fibre from the seed pod of the tropical Kapok tree

<sup>196</sup> Benghazi captured by allied forces

<sup>197</sup> A fortified Italian frontier post, and the site of a minor but costly action by the NZ 21st Battalion



**Figures 44**

Crashed Hurricane in the desert (photo: unknown German soldier)





**Figure 45**  
Sandstorm (photo: Werner Hundt)



## DIARY 1942

1942 began with the NZGREU camped in the desert near Cairn 52, just inside the Libyan border between Sidi Omar and Bir Sheferzen. This was a period of allied victory in the desert. The next few months, however, would see a complete reversal of allied fortunes. The 13 man unit, which was split into two and sometimes three teams, was tasked with recording the dead buried in cemeteries and in the wider landscape between Bardia in Libya and Sidi Barrani in Egypt, a huge expanse of mostly empty desert. (At that time, the South African 1st and 2nd GRUs were operating to the west of the NZGREU, while the British 5 GRU had units at Tobruk and Mersa Matruh). Often under attack itself, as the tide of battle turned, the NZGREU continued to work more or less without interruption. Wally himself spent three months in the desert before his first break in Cairo, during this time visiting Tobruk, via El Adam, the furthest west in Libya he reached during the campaign, and another four months before his second. Finally, however, even the rear-based GRUs had to retreat and were hurried back unceremoniously to the Nile delta. Briefly charged with defending a stretch of coast at Sollum, this period was the closest to fighting (if not the war) Wally got.

In these volumes,<sup>198</sup> the primary themes of the diary are again largely unchanged—the minutiae of army life, the weather (which we see getting hotter), the mail, personal health, mechanical things. The war and its dead meanwhile, who for the first time we see in explicit detail, come over to the reader as almost incidental, the everyday backdrop to a monstrous tactical and bureaucratic machine.

During April, after four months in the field, Wally was promoted to Captain and took over command of the NZGREU from Sydney Josland. From this point on, he compiled the Unit War Diary<sup>199</sup> in addition to writing the personal diary transcribed here, and we are able usefully to compare the two. Although in many places they are almost identical, the unit diary tends to be fuller and its language more formal. In two entries, for example, Wally substituted the

word “labour” for “Coon”, which he used in his personal diary, while the light asides that in places characterise his personal diary, are absent altogether from the unit diary. He also toned down criticisms of other GRU personnel and a number of self-satisfied entries, in which he attributes ideas and actions to himself. Overall, as with many narratives intended for personal or only limited consumption, when compared to the Unit War Diary, his personal diary does not show him in a wholly good light. But far from diminishing his achievement, it in fact highlights for us what an ordinary—or even an imperfect—man can do under extraordinary circumstances.

Important additions to Wally's diary in the Unit War Diary include more details of what the different teams did, more names of unit personnel (Appx 4), the names and (in a few cases) locations of cemeteries not referred to elsewhere (Appx 5), and further detail of the comings-and-goings of other Army Graves Service personnel and of the interaction between the NZGREU and other army personnel. Example entries in the text below are inset and prefaced [UWD].

## JANUARY

### Thursday 1st January

*Out to Libyan Omar to erect crosses & Stakes. Thence to Omar Nuovo to locate large number of graves in area. Very severe dust storm — Gale force. Back to camp. Skipper's tent down with broken pole — others in bad way — mine badly torn. Visited UDF Dressing Station to receive attention for swelling on neck. Anthrax feared. Hot Boracic Forments every 2 hrs. Very cold night. Rain & Gale force wind — dust stopped.*

### Friday 2nd January

*To Bir Omar Nuovo to erect crosses & register graves. I R [Royal] Sussex, 42 RT Regt [Royal Tank Regiment], Indians, Germans & Itals.*

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<sup>198</sup> The diary up to the 18th of February was written in a small telephone number book. Entries from the 18th were written in a pocket diary, which Wally bought in Alexandria (Figure 1)

<sup>199</sup> Josland and Schramm, 1941–42

Went to S African Dressing Station to have boil on neck dressed.  
Home in dark.

Terribly Cold.

### **Saturday 3rd January**

No sleep on account of boil. Stayed in bed till midday. Stencilling crosses & stakes. Sent Reg & Cpl Burt out to erect same. Bed early — very cold.

No Sleep.

### **Sunday 4th January**

To Salvage Depot with Capt Josland. Secured 200 rds .40mm [?caliber] Automatic Ammo. Saw 900 NZ prisoners released by capture of Bardia. Terrible privations — bearded & looking very old. Stan Miles & McGregor of 21st Bn. Little food & no water. Terribly dirty state. Boil burst in evening — Great relief. Very messy business. Cold night — Moon grand at 2030 hrs. Should sleep tonight. No pain in neck.

### **Monday 5th January**

Left for Tobruch<sup>200</sup> via Libyan Sheferzen. Across 30 miles of a veritable sea of powdery clay dust. Heavy going. Then improved slightly till we hit Trigh Capuzzo & then El Adem. Then on towards Tobruch and 8th Army, Rear HQ. Stopped here for night. Today was warmest & calmest & most pleasant for about 6 weeks. Very cold night. Boys slept in trucks & I shared tent in visiting officers' lines. Very agreeable young Gren. [Grenadier] Guards officer in tent.

### **Tuesday 6th January**

Terrific Hun raid on Tobruch commenced at 0445 till 0715. Heavy "sticks" into Air field at El Adem. Grand Barrage. REs [Royal Engineers] detonating mines inside perimeter defences of Tobruch. Conference with Capt. Lange<sup>201</sup> of 5 GRU, Capt. Bagelly [Bagley] of 1 & 2 SA GRU &

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<sup>200</sup> The Italian spelling of Tobruk, used on earlier allied maps. Occasionally, Wally mixed the Italian and English spelling, rendering it "Tobruck"

<sup>201</sup> Known as "Bones of the Eighth" (Thomas, 1977, p. 1)

*Self for NZ GRU after waiting till 1300 hrs. Then into the town of Tobruch to 5 GRU office. Very pretty Italian town — or was. Harbour chock-full of ships — mostly sunken. Went to Ordinance re. parts for petrol cookers. Then set out for Bardia & Gambut. Reached ½ way roadhouse<sup>202</sup> and stopped for night. Camped inside a cosy room of a nice stone building. Very cold night — nasty boil on back of left hand.*

### **Wednesday 7th January**

*Up at 0815 hrs. Signal boys gave me a brand new Hun Bivvy Tent. Set off again — reached Bardia 1230. Lunch & had a look around. Left for Fort Capuzzo — good tar sealed road all the way. Capuzzo to Camp across bare Desert — hundreds of graves along route. Arrived to find Owen back from Matruh & Capt. Josland left for same place.*

*Quiet night.*

*Boil on hand going all OK.*

### **Thursday 8th January**

*Proceeded to scene of crashed Wellington Bomber with PO [Pilot Officer] Woody. Exhumed 2 bodies & obtained identification of PO Cruickshank & Sgt Pilot Deane [Dean].<sup>203</sup> Opened common grave — remains of 3 bodies but identification impossible owing to terrible state of bodies. Mangled — burnt & putrefied. Woody sick over business. Accounted for 7 bodies in all. Quiet night. Cold.*

### **Friday 9th January**

*Sent Woody off with Ration Convoy. In camp all day. Reg overhauling V-8 [lorry].*

*Quiet night but very cold.*

*Boil on left hand kept me awake all night — very painful.*

### **Saturday 10th January**

*Reg & Cpl Hinton to Fort Capuzzo for water.*

*Heaviest dust storm experienced so far. Almost as dark as night. Wind blowing strong gale. Cookhouse tent went — Poles gone. H\*\*l of a job doing repairs. Temporary repairs after 2 hrs hard work. No lull in storm. Very cold. Knocked hand & tore bandage off — ½ of core wrenched out — Very painful.*

## Sunday 11th January

*Ration day.*

*Office work — Skipper returned from Matruh & Owen from Bardia & Salum.<sup>204</sup>*

*Reg overhauling truck engine.*

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<sup>202</sup> The *Via Balbia* or *Litoranea* was lined with 65 *case cantoniere* (roadmen's barracks, later used as rest houses for travellers) built of pumice imported from Lipari (Canali, 2014; De Agostini, 1938, p. 22; Wright, 1969, pp. 178–79). There was one at Gambut, half way between Tobruk and Bardia

<sup>203</sup> Pilot Officer David Cruickshank and Sergeant Alan Dean of the RAFVR. Cruickshank and Dean were observer and wireless operator/air gunner respectively of Wellington Z8907, 109 Squadron, which was shot down on the morning of 21st of November 1941, while on a mission to jam German radio communications. The exhumed bodies were therefore seven weeks old. The other five were those of the aircraft's pilots, Pilot Officer Orval Hughes, an American citizen from New York, and Flight Sergeant Herbert Wolf, both of the RCAF, Sergeant Edward Lowther, also of the RCAF, Sergeant Donald Cross (another wireless operator/air gunner) of the RAFVR, and Lieutenant Colonel Roderick Denman of the Royal Signal Corps, a specialist in radio countermeasures. The ages of the dead ranged between 20 (Sergeants Cross and Lowther) and 46 (Colonel Denman). A letter of the 12th of January from the Officer in Command of 109 Squadron (Detachment) to Mrs Le Bar, pilot Officer Hughes' mother, begins "I am very sorry indeed to have to tell you that your son, Pilot Officer O.B. Hughes, who has been missing since 21st November, is now known to have been killed in action. His aircraft took off on an operational flight at 8.30 am that morning and was shot down about two hours later, there is no doubt that he was killed instantly, and he has been buried, near the other members of his crew, beside the crashed aircraft in the desert". According to the Grave Concentration Report Form, the crash site was somewhere near Libyan Sheferzen. All seven crew members were later re-buried at Halfaya-Sollum War Cemetery. (Bomber Command Museum of Canada Archives, 2005, p. 248; n.d, p. 5; The National Archives, n.d.; RAF Commands, 2013; Williams, 1944). Two Wellingtons were claimed by the *Luftwaffe* for that day (Shores and Ring, 1969, p. 65)

<sup>204</sup> The Italian spelling of Sollum, used on early allied maps

*Extremely cold night.  
Ice in V-8 radiator.*

### **Monday 12th January**

*Out all day along frontier wire from Omar Nuovo to Frontier Post 44.*

*Located several graves. 2 Hurricane pilots.*

*Water Day.*

*Doing grave returns all afternoon. Boil on right hand a little troublesome.*

*Very cold night.*

*Radiators frozen.*

### **Tuesday 13th January**

*Ration day.*

### **Wednesday 14th January**

*[No diary entry. Sydney Josland's Unit War Diary reads:] Location graves Capuzzo Area. Rations drawn.*

### **Thursday 15th January**

*Owen evacuated to MDS [Main Dressing Station] (SA) with bad flu — or a touch of Malaria. Self out all day locating graves. Did three exhumations for identification. Dust bad at Bir Omar Nuovo. Hand very bad so called at S African MDS to have boil washed with 5% Peroxide & then hot Boracic forment applied. Renewed dressing at night. Finger very inflamed but boil burst in night — great relief. Good night's sleep.*

### **Friday 16th January**

*Skipper left to establish camp at or near Bardia. Self in camp all day. Terrible storm from 0600 hrs. Tents having a real bad spin. Sand lifting badly till 1930 hrs. Wind still going full bore — very cold. Packing ready for move tomorrow. Dressed boil — discharging well & going on very well.*

### **Saturday 17th January**

*Shifted to vicinity of Bardia. Camped in very comfortable concrete house by road side about 8 Kilos from Bardia. Very snug & very warm at*

night. Dust doesn't worry us here. Hope we stay in house for a goodly spell.

### **Sunday 18th January**

Reg & Self out in search of graves in Bardia. Located 1 lonely Ital. Medical Orderly close to jetty in Bardia harbour.

### **Monday 19th January**

Out near Fort Capuzzo. Located numerous unidentified British graves. Home 1500 hrs & then to mobile Bath Unit near Campo Romano and had a most glorious hot shower. First real bath for more than 10 weeks.

### **Tuesday 20th January**

Reg & McLeary away to Sidi Omar to collect rations. Self doing plans of various graves located.

### **Wednesday 21st January**

All day doing squares 515–517 by 373–375.<sup>205</sup>

Lots of "Loot".

Found only 11 Ital. graves.

Head to tail for many miles along road (Figure 46).

### **Thursday 22nd January**

All day systematically combing part of Capuzzo–Salum Area, Squares 515 to 522 x 371–378.<sup>206</sup> Located — British, Ital., NZ graves & Large Aussie cemetery (180 graves). Met NZ Railway Survey Coy in Bir Haqflet Wa'ir.<sup>207</sup> Dust bad in early afternoon. Cleared about 1530 hrs. Traffic very congested on Capuzzo–Salum road. Vehicles in endless stream.

### **Friday 23rd January**

Working around area close to house & 6 Kilo Peg on Bardia–Capuzzo road. Located numerous Ital. graves.

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<sup>205</sup> Grid squares 515–517 East/373–375 North. They straddle a kink in the Egypt-Libya border SE of Fort Capuzzo and WSW of Musaid and Sollum

<sup>206</sup> A much larger area between Capuzzo and Sollum

<sup>207</sup> c. 5173 3715 on WW2 maps



**Figures 46**

Desert convoy (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

### **Saturday 24th January**

*Combing area around Fort Musaid or rather the heap of rubble that was once a proud Italian Fort. Working at Aussie War Cemetery.<sup>208</sup>*

### **Sunday 25th January**

*Day off. Went out hunting for badges, flags, etc. Collected epaulettes (Figure 47) & flags & loads of fleas.*

*Fleas very annoying at night.*

### **Monday 26th January**

*Dust very bad — South wind. Left for Salum, but had to go back —*

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<sup>208</sup> Wally drew no distinction between “military” and “war” cemeteries. Most of those he worked on, he called “military” cemeteries. This is contrary to current UK usage, the CWGC, for example, calling cemeteries that comprise non-war military burials, “military” cemeteries, and cemeteries in which lie the remains of military and related personnel who died at war, “war” cemeteries



*dust worst I have known. Pitch dark at midday. Rooms full of dust. All coughing blood from inhaling dust particles. Have never known such a storm. No abatement at night.*

*Fleas bad.*

### **Tuesday 27th January**

*Made an attempt at cleaning up dust inside house. Then to Aussie Cemetery near Musaid Fort on Salum—Halfaya Rd. Home early — shaved — Found dust particles just as bad inside house. Wind & dust*



**Figure 47**  
Panzer ORs' epaulette  
souvenired by Wally  
(photo: Dal McGuirk)

*bad again at night. 5 French Air Force men slept night with us & 10 Tommies outside in trucks. Fleas troublesome.*

### **Wednesday 28th January**

*Left at 0600 hrs for Tobruch. Arrived at 5 GRU at 1000 hrs. Very busy all day at BOD [Base Ordinance Depot], DID [Detail Issue Depot],<sup>209</sup> Petrol Point, etc. Left Tobruch at 1830 hrs. Travelled by moonlight. Road very bad. Hit some very bad jolts. Broke main leaf in right rear spring.*

<sup>209</sup> The Detail Issue Depot stored and distributed basic supplies

*Arrived at Billets at 2250 hrs. Very tired. Prepared a very welcome hot meal. Good night's sleep.*

**Thursday 29th January<sup>210</sup>**

*Working in office all day. Prepared plan of Aussie War Cemetery at Salum.*

*Writing at night.*

**Friday 30th January**

*To Salum (Sollum) Barracks & left personal battery to be charged at LAD [Light Aid Detachment].*

*Replaced broken spring leaf (main) in rear right assembly. Left at 1600 hrs for billets. Bright moonlight night. Cold & Quiet. Found 12 v. Vorta (Hun) battery — 1 cell dud.*

**Saturday 31st January**

*Overhauling large double-burner Petrol cooker which I found near Salum. Burns very well indeed. Drops pressure. Found leak in tank & soldered hole. Tried burner out by doing load of washing. Oky Doka [okey dokey]. Making E [electric] light fittings for self & Owen & assisted him to reassemble his Automatic Pistol.*

*(Radio news not very cheering. Japs only 16 miles from Singapore Island).*

**FEBRUARY**

**Sunday 1st February**

*Easy day — Went to Campo Romano WP [Water Point] for Water. Spent rest of day pottering around — repairing Jerry typewriter. (Terrible machine).*

*Dusty all Day.*

**Monday 2nd February**

*Doing Registration returns re. Salum Australian Cemetery & completed initial copy of plan of same cemetery. Major Menzies (DAGRU) for lunch.<sup>211</sup>*

*Skipper returned from Mersa Matruh with 200 Permanent Crosses. Bad Dust Blow.*

### **Tuesday 3rd February**

*Stencilled some of Permanent Crosses for Aussie cemetery at Salum & then went across to erect same & mound up graves. Libyan situation pretty tense.<sup>212</sup> Heard over the air that Air Mail Service has been suspended till further notice. It has been a grand service & while it was in operation what a boon to all concerned. Dusty during day — calm at night.*

### **Wednesday 4th February**

*Reveille — 0500 hrs & left for Tobruch to draw rations & 48 Gallons of petrol — our maximum allowance from that centre. Heavy convoys on coast road & Trigh Capuzzo. Arrived Tobruch 0945 hrs.<sup>113</sup> Collected mail & called at 5 GRU. Dust storm blew up & became terribly thick. Very difficult to locate dumps at VI [6] DID. Called at 155 Petrol Point. Became lost in dust. Collected 86 gals petrol & left for Capuzzo. Slow &*

<sup>210</sup> Benghazi retaken by axis forces

<sup>211</sup> Andrew Menzies of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Menzies, a Canadian, had been in charge of war graves in Greece prior to the German invasion. He became Deputy Assistant Graves Registration Unit under Herbert Hart

<sup>212</sup> By this date the axis advance was nearing the Gazala line, west of Tobruk, where it would be temporarily halted

<sup>213</sup> Afrikakorps historian and collector, Dal McGuirk writes of two pieces of trench art from Tobruk that Wally gave him. "A flattened piece cut from an artillery shell and with etched DAK symbol and North African motifs and a LW eagle cut and etched from a Perspex windscreen taken from a crashed aircraft.

"Wally told me in December 1941 he was in Tobruk down near the harbour where he saw a crowd of soldiers standing up close to the wire fence that surrounded the barbed wire 'cage' holding German POWs. He walked down to see what was happening. The German POWs were trading what they made in the camp either for trade or as their own souvenirs, what soldiers called 'trench art'. The Germans were trading their art work with the Allied soldiers for dates, eggs, oranges and tomatoes. Wally had a bag of oranges in his lorry and he walked back to get them. He exchanged the oranges for the shell plate and the small Perspex LW eagle" (Figures 48 and 49, overleaf)



**Figures 48 and 49**

*Afrikakorps “trench art” bought by Wally at Tobruk (photos: Dal McGuirk)*

very tiring journey — Back at 1950 hrs. Had first meal of day & what a feed. — Red Feather Steak & mixed Veggies.

### Thursday 5th February

Spent day in Billets stencilling permanent crosses for Aust. 6 Div. Cemetery at Salum.<sup>214</sup>

Overhauled 2 single burner petrol stoves.

On lookout for mail to be delivered by NZ RMT [Reserve Motor Transport] Convoy. Did not arrive.

Jerry raided El Adam Drome & Convoys on roads.

Planes over Billet during night — no bombs here.

### Friday 6th February

Sent Cpl Burt, Ptes Perry & Crutch to erect crosses at Salum Cemetery. Went with Capt. Josland to look for Pistol (.22) Ammo. No Luck. Balance of day branding rest of permanent crosses for Salum Aussie (6 Div.) Cemetery. Drafted report on Cemetery. Handed to Cpl Hinton to be typed & sent off. Beautiful calm day & quite warm. Best day's weather in 2½ months. No wind — no dust.

### Saturday 7th February

Hun plane over about 0430 hrs, till 0630 hrs. Bofors at Bardia active. Bombs dropped at points on roads near Bardia. Camps & transport heavily machine gunned. Stick of 3 heavy bombs dropped just north of billet. Plane only about 200 ft high & plainly visible. Light in cockpit. Passed slowly over our billet & dropped Heavy bomb. Landed about 200 yds from house — Hell of a crash — Thought roof was coming in on us. Armoured car crews opened fire but ineffective — plane turned & gave them a good pastings with guns — no casualties. Completed erection of crosses at Aussie Cemetery at Salum. Home about 1500 hrs. Recce'd culvert near house as an air raid shelter — Jolly good & will get men into it whenever Bofors guns open fire on marauders. Very pleasant day & quite warm for a change. Here's hoping we have a quiet night tonight.

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<sup>214</sup> Stockings, 2009, p. 265

### **Sunday 8th February**

*Working day in billets.*

*Jerry plane over very low at 0445 hrs. No eggs. Jerry came down out of the sun in power dive at 1000 hrs and let go 2 HE [high explosive] Bombs. Missed house & landed 100+ [yards] away. All convoys halted & dived for cover. No damage. Went to Salum Barracks & collected Skipper's Battery. 2 SA Div. [2nd South African Division] HQ shifting to Salum Bay because of the attention Hun planes have been paying Barracks buildings. Called at NZ Railway Survey Coy HQ.*

### **Monday 9th February**

*Did a Recce in search of new billets away from road & water point. No luck so far.*

*Visited Hun & Ital. Cemetery on headland across bay from Bardia.*

*700–800 graves.*

*Hun plane over about 0500 hrs.*

### **Tuesday 10th February**

*Working in billets in morning.*

*Had good wash down & washed clothes. Caught scores of fleas. Clothes are simply Lousy.*

*Out searching for graves in afternoon. Salvaged 6 v. generator from Ital. truck. Will try & make windmill to drive it for battery charging.*

*Fine warm day.*

*Hun plane over about 0500 hrs. Bombs dropped about 1 m [mile] away.*

### **Wednesday 11th February**

*Reg to Tobruk to draw Petrol, Kerosene & Rations. Self at Billets all day. Major Menzies arrived from Tobruk with loads of mail. Skipper returned from Matruh. Cyst on third knuckle of right hand swollen to immense size — went to MDS in Wadi Sceammis [Wadi esc Sciomar?] & had minor operation — cyst frozen & then core  $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter &  $\frac{3}{4}$ " deep cut out in solid lump. Felt a bit groggy for a while.*

*Good night's rest.*

**Thursday 12th February**

*Inspected various sites with object of selecting a new dwelling place.*

*Collected hordes of fleas.*

*Very restless night owing to fleas but settled them with Keatings.*

**Friday 13th February**

*Went out to Marsa er Ramla<sup>215</sup> & located solitary RAF Pilot's grave.*

*Unknown.*

*No loot at all in any of the deserted "possies".<sup>216</sup>*

*Air raids in morning.*

**Saturday 14th February**

*Made trip to Salum to inspect new quarters & selected a nice cave for own little "Home". Cleaned cave ready to move in & returned to W Point [Water Point] dwelling. Packed belongings ready to move & stayed in house overnight.*

*At 0900 hrs, bed was being graded for railway line at Capuzzo — at 1230 hrs track was being laid & by 1500 hrs the 1st train was at Capuzzo.*

**Sunday 15th February**

*Heavy Air raids from 0330 hrs till about 0630 hrs.*

*Loaded gear & shifted to new dwelling at Salum Bay (Figure 50).*

*Magnificent caves right in under the escarpment — Spiral road passes right overhead. Settled in new abode. SA Scottish [the Transvaal Scottish] destroying booby traps consisting of stick bombs with trip wire attached to pin. Great fireworks display.*

**Monday 16th February**

*President of Audit Board to Audit books of NZ GRU.*

*Erected Wireless Aerial.*

*Packing for early get away tomorrow morning.*

*Collected 6 v. Vorta Battery from 4th Field Workshop (SA), 4 Bde, I Div.*

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<sup>215</sup> On the coast between Sollum and Bardia

<sup>216</sup> Possy = position, dug-out etc.





**Figures 50**  
Sollum Bay. NZGREU  
HQ was in the  
escarpment to the  
left of the pier  
(photo: M. Ellis)

### **Tuesday 17th February**

*Reveille 0400 hrs. Left Salum at 0530 hrs — Puncture — 4 Kilos west of Barrani at 0745 — off again 0805 hrs. 0830 — Puncture 6 Kilos E of Barrani. 0930 — off again. 1100 Puncture. 1130 hrs off again — 94 Kilos W of Matruh. Arrive Matruh 1240 hrs. New tube from DADOS. Left again at 1410 hrs. Alex. at 1930 hrs. Reported to CMP [Corps of Military Police] at Kom el Dik Fort — attained room at Hotel Syracuse at 2200 hrs.*

*Huge dinner at 2230 — 1st meal since 0430 hrs — Soup — Fish — Steak & Chips & Salad — French Pastry & Mince Meat & Fruit and Beer.*

*Glorious night in a real spring bed.*

### **Cairo**

### **Wednesday 18th February**

*[First entry in new diary:] Bought “Envoy” (Remington) Typewriter in Alexandria*

*£E 15.00.*



[Last entry in old diary:] Left Alex 1130 hrs.

Arrived Cairo 1430 hrs.

Booked at NZ Forces Club.

To Maadi — Truck to Base Ordnance Workshop. Collected clothes from Base Kit & back to Cairo. Dinner at Club (NZ).

A Heavenly Hot Bath.

### Thursday 19th February

Started day with glorious hot bath. Spent day dashing round Cairo in an orgy of shopping — Lamp glasses, parts for HP Lamp, Torch Batteries, Diary.

Took Ital. stamp to Oriental Philatelic House & left film for D. & P.

[developing & printing].

Typing letters in evening.

Met Reg Perry.

### Friday 20th February

Rang DAD, GRU, & found he was at Heliopolis. Waited till he sent truck to Club & then went out to him.

Very busy morning. Back to Cairo on Metro. Very pleasant ride in nice surroundings.

Shopping in afternoon.

Writing in evening.

### Saturday 21st February

Out to Maadi. Left boots for repairs: Sid Josland's — Pt 3.

Collected Ford from workshops.

Lunch at N Inf. Trg [North Infantry Training] Depot, 31st Bn.

Back to town and left truck at Kasr el Nil Barracks.

Did shopping.

In room all evening.

Met Sister Campbell in Emad el Din (**Figure 51**).<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Sharia Emad el Din, a centre of Cairo nightlife in the 30s and 40s and location of the Ritz Theatre and a number of nightclubs and cinemas (Helmy, 2011)



**Figures 51**  
Sharia Emad El Din (photo:  
unknown)

### **Sunday 22nd February**

*Out to DAD, GRU, then back to base PO. Collected a little mail.  
Called Red Cross Bureau & found Carl Ferguson & Bernie Thurston<sup>218</sup>  
are both POW [sic] in Italy.*

*Window shopping all afternoon & up to Mousky Bazaar.  
Rang Mae Dysart<sup>219</sup> re. news of Carl & invited her to have dinner.  
Home in evening.*

### **Monday 23rd February**

*At DAD's office in morning & then to Maadi Camp to DADOS [Deputy  
Assistant Director of Ordinance Services].  
Collected Stencil Ink.  
Lunch at N Inf. Trg Depot. Back to town, left bus at Kasr el Nil Barracks.  
Met Sister Mae Dysart & had dinner. Told her about Carlos & arranged  
to locate NZ soldier's grave for her.*

*Out to Heliopolis — with Capt. King.  
Home to Club.*

## **Tuesday 24th February**

*Attended to some correspondence till 1100 hrs, then to GRU office, Heliopolis, to see DAD, Major Peek.*

*Back to town & lunch at NZ Club. Out to Heliopolis Sporting Club in afternoon. Tea at Hel. Club. Back to NZ Club for Dinner.*

*In all evening.*

## **Wednesday 25th February**

*Left NZ Forces Club at 0900 hrs & went to Maadi Camp. Packed kit in Base Kit Store. Had boil on arm dressed at Base Reception Depot, RAP [Regimental Aid Post]. Back to Cairo — to Base PO. Left at 1145 hrs for WD [Western Desert]. Arrived Alexandria at 1500 hrs. Booked in at Hotel Syracuse. (PT 48). Had dinner at Greek Hotel & then strolled waterfront promenade (Figure 52)<sup>220</sup> — very refreshing after hot dusty drive. Back to Hotel & Bed early.*

## **Back to the Desert**

## **Thursday 26th February**

*Met boys at Kom el Dik Fort at 0800 hrs & left for Salum via North Road.*

*Called at GRU (No 5 at Matruh). Left Matruh at 1700 hrs & travelled steadily in moonlight. Arrived at caves in Salum Bay at 2130 hrs.*

*Reported to OC.*

## **Friday 27th February**

*Spent whole day settling in after leave & in conferring with Josland & typing letters.*

*Quiet night — Cool.*

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<sup>218</sup> Private Bernard Thurston

<sup>219</sup> Sister Elizabeth (May) Dysart of the NZ Army Nursing Service

<sup>220</sup> The Corniche



Figures 52

The Corniche, Alexandria (photo: unknown)

### **Saturday 28th February**

*Skipper left for leave in Cairo.*

*In camp in morning.*

*Out on prowl in Bardia Area all afternoon.*

*Quiet night — very cold.*

## **MARCH**

### **Sunday 1st March**

*Moulded lead sinkers for new fishing lines.*

*Sea very rough — Wind NE.*

*Dust blowing.*

*Typing duplicate letters.*

*Home all day.*

*Owen to Gambut to draw water.*

**Monday 2nd March**

*In camp all day.*

*Lt Owen to MI [Medical Inspection] Room for check-over by MO.  
(Heart)*

**Tuesday 3rd March**

*Owen evacuated to 2 NZGH [New Zealand General Hospital],  
Matruh.*

*Went out to 95 Kilo Peg on Tobruch–Bardia Rd & then out towards coast  
to visit Bedouin Camp.*

*Lots of salvage in recent Hun camp.*

**Wednesday 4th March**

*Reg to see about tyres & tubes & to draw water at Campo Romano WP.  
Ration cut down to ½ gal. per man, per day — perhaps.*

*Visited by NZ Mobile Canteen (Woolworths).*

*Rain commenced to fall at 0900 hrs, steadily & then got heavier.*

*Torrential by nightfall — Wadi a ranging torrent — Large men's cave  
flooded out & mine under water — 6 ins deep.*

*Very Heavy thunder & lightning all night.*

**Thursday 5th March**

*Raining heavily all night & continued all day.*

*Mess tent flooded out & then blown down. Hell of a mess. Raised floor of  
my cave in an endeavour to divert water outside & made guttering to go  
above doorway.*

*Boys rescued Mess tent & re-erected it on a fresh spot. Strong wind  
blowing all day. Quite chilly.*

**Friday 6th March**

*Went out to Point 207<sup>221</sup> to locate and register graves. Did 21 Itals. Went  
via Hellfire Pass. Ground in terrible state after rains & truck bogged  
several times.*

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<sup>221</sup> c. 12 km southwest of Sollum, c. 5185 3644

*Sent Ptes Gasgoigne,<sup>222</sup> McLeary & Jennings to Sidi Barrani for rations.*

### **Saturday 7th March**

*Did reports, plans & sketches of graves located 6–3–42.*

*Visit from officers of 1/6 Rajputana Rifles re. exhumation of body on Victory Road (Figure 53).<sup>223</sup>*

### **Sunday 8th March**

*Out to coast near Marsa Lucch. Visited ship "Knight of Malta".*

*Terrible torpedo damage. Ship right ashore & complete wreck.<sup>224</sup>*

*Bartered tea for 1 doz. eggs.*

*Pte Gasgoigne drew water (2 days rations).*

### **Monday 9th March**

*Boys out to Marsa Lucch for more eggs. Self in camp all day.*

### **Tuesday 10th March**

*Along Victory Road to Salum Outer perimeter minefields. Exhumed body, marked as unknown British Soldier.*

*Found disc on wrist-bone.*

*Definitely a Hun.*

*Searched bottoms of Wadis leading from Hellfire but no graves found.*

### **Wednesday 11th March**

*Did area north of Bardia Outer Perimeter Minefields on east side of Bardia–Capuzzo road. Found Ital. graves all over the place.*

*Home middle of afternoon.*

*Skipper arrived from Cairo via Alex. & Matruh.*

### **Thursday 12th March**

*Going over reports with Josland & discussing question of Promotion for us both.*

*In camp all day.*

### **Friday 13th March**

*Into Bardia to exhume body. Obtained discs & thus established identity.*



**Figures 53**

The “Victory Road” outside Bardia (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

*Camp in time for late lunch.*

*Spent afternoon writing Home & doing reports.*

*Capt. Knapp,<sup>225</sup> DADAPS [Deputy Assistant Director Army Postal Services] (NZ), spent night with us.*

### **Saturday 14th March**

*Left for Matruh at 0900 hrs. Arrived at 1400 hrs.*

*Called at 5 GRU Office & then to Transit Camp to make contact with*

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<sup>222</sup> Bob Gascoigne. Unidentifiable as either Gascoigne or Gascoigne

<sup>223</sup> The *Via della Vittoria*, the extension of the Italian *Litoranea* from Bardia into Italian occupied Egypt

<sup>224</sup> The Knight of Malta ran aground off Ras Azzaz to the east of Marsa Lucch on the night of 2nd–3rd March while carrying troops from Alexandria to Tobruk. She was later depicted on a Maltese postage stamp. There is no other record of her being torpedoed

<sup>225</sup> Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) Alban Knapp of the NZ Army Postal Service, NZ Engineers

*2 Lt Hutchinson who replaces Owen.*

*Out to 2 NZGH with Letter from Capt. Josland. Afternoon tea at Sisters' Mess. Back to Matruh — Dinner at Transit Camp, P1 3 — Excellent. Slept at 5 GRU.*

### **Sunday 15th March**

*Left Matruh at 0830 hrs.*

*Had lunch at Sidi Barrani Road House.*

*Arrived at Salum at 1500 hrs.*

*Visit from Capt. Saunders [Sanders] (Aust. GRU)<sup>226</sup> — Stayed night.*

*Visit from 2 Lt McKinnon 5 GRU.*

*Little get-together in Skippers Cave.*

### **Monday 16th March**

*Left 0900 hrs for inspection trip to the Omars to show DAD, Major Peek, various cemeteries in that locality.*

*Visited Bir Ghirba & found fine example of Owen's mess up.*

*Dust fairly bad all day.*

*Did various returns in evening.*

### **Tuesday 17th March**

*Skipper & Major Peek to Sidi Rezegh & Area.*

*Self in camp all day.*

*Cold Westerly wind all day.*

### **Wednesday 18th March**

*Took Hutchinson to vicinity of Railhead at Capuzzo.*

*Found double grave. Exhumed two bodies. No means of identification.*

*Home in afternoon.*

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<sup>226</sup> Captain R. Sanders, OC of the 1st Australian Graves Registration & Enquiry Unit. 1 Australian GREU was based in Damascus. Sanders with a small detachment had travelled to the Western Desert to photograph and re-stencil the inscriptions on Australian graves located there. The unit's War Diary mentions being quartered with NZGREU on the 3rd of April, on the way back from Tobruk, but not on the 15th March (1 War Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit, 1942, pp. 169–75, 211–212)



**Thursday 19th March**

*Skipper & Peek to Mersa Matruh. Hutchinson — Hellfire Pass Area.  
Self in Camp all day.*

**Friday 20th March**

*Nos 2 & 3 trucks to Sidi Azeiz. Did plan of South African Cemetery.  
Located host of graves.*

*Exhumed majority — mostly NZA [New Zealand Army] Lads. Bodies  
in bad way.*

*Went North to escarpment & found small cemetery & lone grave.  
Plotted locality.*

**Saturday 21st March**

*Heavy dust storm.*

*Office all morning.*

*Out to grounded Plane — 7 miles East of Halfaya Pass turnoff.*

*Broke spring leaf (main — rear) on trip.*

*Boat stolen during night.*

**Sunday 22nd March**

*Self & Josland & Hutchinson visited Court Astley<sup>227</sup> at 85 NZ Salvage,  
Marsa Lucch. Lunch there. Out to visit Senussi villages. No goods for sale.  
Bought eggs.*

**Monday 23rd March**

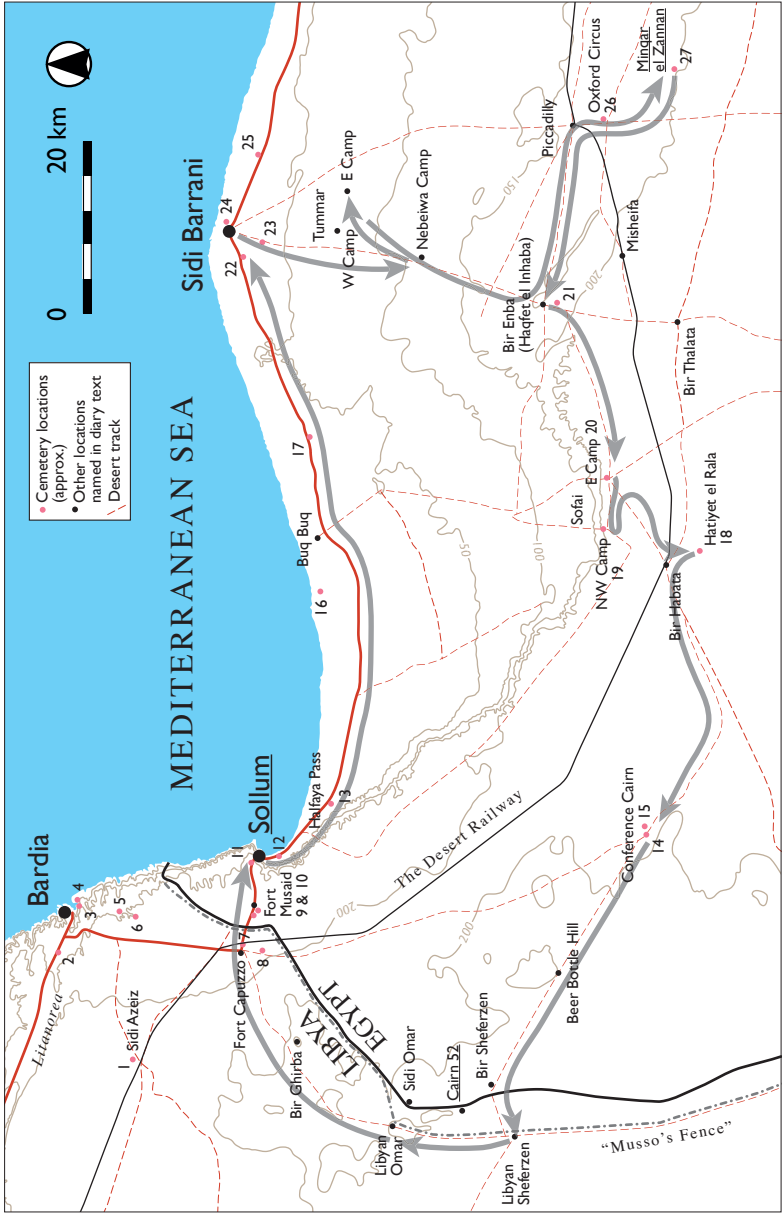
*No 2 & 3 Trucks to Field Workshop for, (2) New Spring Assembly, [&]  
(3), New Hand Brake cable. (Not fixed).*

**Tuesday 24th March**

*Set off on tour of inspection of NZ GRU Area (Figure 54). 2nd Heaviest  
dust storm I have known raging. Trip to Sidi Barrani 5½ hrs instead of  
2 hrs. Observed many vehicles off road in dust storm. Visibility about  
10–12 ft. Left road at Barrani & set off South across desert, destination,  
Piccadilly & El Zannan. Got to Nibeiba & by then visibility had become nil.*

---

<sup>227</sup> Malcolm Court Astley



**Figure 54**

Wally's 24th–26th of March, 1942, tour of Western Desert cemeteries, showing NZGREU camps (underlined) and other locations mentioned in Wally's text (see Appx 5 for details of numbered cemeteries)

*Waited & then turned back toward Barrani. Wind eased a little so erected tent at Tummar E Camp. Terrific blow & dust during night. Tent blown to pieces, but we stuck it out.*

*What a night! Nuff sed.*

**Wednesday 25th March**

*Still blowing but a littler easier. Struck remains of tent & off again. Inspected Bir Enba Cemetery & registered graves. Onto Oxford Circus Cemetery & then El Zannan.<sup>228</sup> Very large number of fresh burials at El Zannan. Registered all new graves & then off back to Bir Enba. Camped for night. Good rest.*

*Storm dying out.*

**Thursday 26th March**

*Left Bir Enba by the Sofafi Track. Graves near Sofafi E Camp. Searched vicinity of Sofafi NW Camp. No results. On to Bir Habata. Located new Cemetery at Hatiyet el Rala, near Bir Habata. Erected crosses. On to Conference Cairn — took short cut via minefields. Registered large number of graves in NW Cemetery, Conference Cairn, & I Kiwi at SE Cem. [cemetery]. On across Frying Pan Flats to Beer bottle Hill & on to Libyan Sheferzen. Turned north along Musso's Fence to Omars — East & North around large new minefields & then Home via Capuzzo.*

**Friday 27th March**

*Spent all day in cave doing huge file of registration returns & plans — result of trip.*

*Boys for rations & water.*

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<sup>228</sup> According to a Graves Concentration Report Form on the concentration of graves from "Piccadilly Circus" Cemetery to Halfaya-Sollum Cemetery, the former was located at "Oxford Circus". It is presumed therefore that Wally's Piccadilly and Oxford Circus cemeteries were the same

**Saturday 28th March**

*Home in morning. Out to Marsa Lucch in afternoon to barter with Senussi for eggs & what-have-they.*

*Back to camp, fairly late but with goodly supply of eggs.*

**Sunday 29th March**

*Reg Perry doing washing.*

*Self & McLeary to 80 FSD to draw rations.*

*Posted mail & purchased stores at EFI [Expeditionary Forces Institute].*

*Away all day.*

**Monday 30th March**

*Stencilled Plot & Row pegs for New Cemetery, Capuzzo, then to the Cemetery to prepare layout.*

*Dust bad — wind very sultry.*

*Bed early but did not sleep owing to cold in head.*

**Tuesday 31st March**

*To Capuzzo, New Cemetery, to complete layout of same.*

*Back to Camp early in afternoon.*

*Cold in head — not so good.*

**APRIL**

**Wednesday 1st April**

*Full Moon.*

*Cold better — but remained Home all day.*

*Prepared plan of Capuzzo "New" Cemetery.*

**Thursday 2nd April**

*Home all day doing returns.*

*Telegram for Josland offering appointment as Staff Capt. attached DAD, GRE, ME (accepted).*

*Looks like my Promotion will come through at last.*

**Friday 3rd April**

*Working in vicinity Fort Capuzzo — numerous dead Itals — not buried (Figure 100). Drew water at Capuzzo WP.*

**Saturday 4th April**

*Boys to draw rations.*

*Self Home all day.*



**Figure 55**

*“Capuzzo”. It is uncertain which cemetery this is (photo: Walter von Schramm)*

**Sunday 5th April**

*Spent day at Marsa Lucch — Trading with Senussi. Bought nice travelling clock & large French Sword — 109 yrs old.*

**Monday 6th April**

*Boys to draw water at Fig Tree Wells WP, Salum.*

*To “New Capuzzo” Cemetery & then to Marsa Lucch to Senussi Camps.*

*Bought [unreadable] Primus & 5 doz. eggs.*

### **Tuesday 7th April**

*Home all day.*

*Painting Inscriptions (Permanent) on crosses for 6 Aust. Div. Cemetery, Salum — Capuzzo Road, near Fort Musaid.*

*Bad cold in head.*

*Boys away for Rations & Petrol.*

### **Wednesday 8th April**

*Reg doing laundry.*

*Self & McLeary to Capuzzo — Rail Head Area. Did several exhumations.*

*Home in afternoon.*

*Cold in head — nose swollen & red.*

### **Thursday 9th April**

*Railhead area all morning.*

*Home in afternoon.*

Red Letter Day:

*Received mail from Home and 2NZEF Force Orders containing my Promotion to Captain — dated 7-2-42.*

*Head cold almost cleared.*

*Bright, Warm, Sunny day.*

### **Friday 10th April**

*Boys to 80 FSD to draw rations — No Mail.*

### **Saturday 11th April**

*In camp all days [sic].*

*Sent boys to draw water at "Fig Tree Wells" WP, Salum.*

*NZ Mobile Broadcasting Unit arrive & made recordings for broadcast in New Zealand.*

Writing letter for mail.

### **Sunday 12th April**

*Home all day.*

*Signwriting — Painting new Unit signs for roadside.*

**Monday 13th April**

*Boys off to draw water, rations, Petrol & Kerosene (MBO [Main Base Ordinance?]).*

*Self completed road-signs.*

*[sketch showing 652F in a box with an arrow beside it]*

*Visit from Padre Judson,<sup>229</sup> NZCF [New Zealand Chaplains Department] (attached to NZ Railway Boys).*

*(Presbyterian),*

*Auckland.*

**Tuesday 14th April**

*To area between Bardia & Menastir.<sup>230</sup>*

*Located a few Ital. graves only.*

*Capt. McIntyre,<sup>231</sup> NZ Official War, artist stopping with us.*

*Also Capt. Lange, 5 GRU.*

**Wednesday 15th April**

*To Menastir Area & located numerous Ital. graves.*

*Out to Marsa Lucch Area & brought Home Hun trailer.*

*Hun plane strafed road & cleaned up 4-wheeler loaded with petrol. 2 killed.*

*Capt. Lange stopped tonight.*

**Thursday 16th April**

*Boys for rations & Beer.*

*Self at home doing returns.*

*Visited by Lt Col. Prideau [Prideaux] & T [Temporary] Lt Col. Steele [Steere].<sup>232</sup>*

*“Shouted” Boys for new “Pip”.*

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<sup>229</sup> Reginald Frank Judson, son of the WWI VC winner, Reginald Stanley Judson

<sup>230</sup> On the coast, c. 20 km north of Bardia

<sup>231</sup> Peter McIntyre

<sup>232</sup> Lieutenant Colonel F. Prideaux and Temporary Lieutenant Colonel H. Steere, Chief Paymaster, Financial Advisor and Chief Auditor of 2NZEF (Stevens, 1958, pp. 323–24)

### **Friday 17th April**

*Out to Bardia & Menastir Areas.*

*Lt Cols Prideau & Steele stayed night. Farewell to Josland who received Signal to report to Maadi re. Directorate Job at GRE, ME.*

### **Saturday 18th April**

*Very heavy dust storm all day. Went to Capuzzo Area but had to return to Camp.*

*NZ YMCA. Mobile Canteen arrived (Woolworths) arrived & stopped night. Gave Movie show. Invited S African Pioneer Corps boys along. Jolly good show.*

*"100 Men & A Girl"<sup>233</sup> & NZ Scenic.*

*[The Unit War Diary (UWD) for the 18th of April—Wally's first entry—reads:] Captain S.W. Josland left for Cairo to join Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries, ME. 2 Lt Hutchinson to Bir Wair and Point 207. Capt. von Schramm to 87 Sub-Area and New Capuzzo Cemetery. Very heavy dust storm (Figures 45 and 56). NZ Mobile Canteen & Cinema arrived & remained for night of 18/19—4—42. "100 Men & A Girl" & NZ Scenic film screened in cave to unit and personnel of UDF Pioneer Corps.*

### **Sunday 19th April**

*Day of Rest (Maybe?)*

*Dust less troublesome.*

*YM [YMCA] boys stayed all day.*

*Doing Odds & Ends of Office Work.*

### **Monday 20th April**

*Hutchinson to Omar Area.*

*In Camp all day.*

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<sup>233</sup> An American musical comedy starring Deanna Durbin and the (then) celebrity conductor Leopold Stokowski





**Figure 56**

Arrival of a dust storm (photo: unknown German soldier)

*Shifting to OC's Cave.*

*Fine day but Hot.*

*Major Peek, DAD, Graves, arrived & remained overnight.*

## **Tuesday 21st April**

*Up to 1181 Pioneer Coy re. Grave-diggers for Capuzzo cemetery. On to cemetery.*

*To 80 FSD for mail.*

*Back to HQ.*

*Officially Appointed to Command Unit.*

*[UWD] To Capuzzo New Cemetery with DAD, GRE. To 1181 Pioneer Coy re. labourers for grave digging. To Salum Bay area with DAD to select site for permanent site for concentration cemetery. 2 Lt Hutchinson returned from Omar Area.*

### **Wednesday 22nd April**

*Major Peek left for Sidi Rezegh. Boys for rations.*

*Capt. Peter Lowe, UDF 2 GRU, Arrived and remained overnight.*

*Very hot day. Very enjoyable Swimming — Very calm day.*

### **Thursday 23rd April**

*To New Cemetery — Capuzzo & 86 Sub-Area re. new Concentration Cemetery at Fig Tree Wells.<sup>234</sup>*

*Major Geo. Peek arrived & stayed.*

*Heavy raid at Railhead.*

*[UWD] To Capuzzo New Cemetery. 2 Lt Hutchinson to Matruh to collect case of stores and new tyres. Floating mine drifted ashore close to camp, and was destroyed by rifle fire by personnel of unit. Capt. von Schramm to 86 Sub-Area re. projected concentration cemetery at Fig Tree Wells, Salum. DAD, GRE, arrived from Sidi Rezegh and remained overnight. Enemy air activity in Salum & Capuzzo Areas.*

### **Friday 24th April**

*Surveyed site of new Cemetery at Fig Tree Wells. Back to office & prepared plans of same.*

*Air raids all night.*

### **Saturday 25th April**

*2 Lt W.K. King<sup>235</sup> Marched In, seconded to Unit from NI [North Infantry] Training. (5 Reifs [Reinforcements]).*

*Capt. Hunter & new English GRU Unit arrived & stayed overnight.*

### **Sunday 26th April**

*Home All Day.*

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

### **Monday 27th April**

*To RE Dump at Railhead. Collected 550 Temporary Crosses. Drew new maps at MAP Depot.*

*Evacuated Tom Baverstock to 2 Indian CCS.<sup>236</sup> (Malaria?)*

**Tuesday 28th April**

*In office all day.*

**Wednesday 29th April**

*In Camp all day.*

*Visited by Brig. Stevens,<sup>237</sup> DAAC, 2 Echelon, 2NZEF, & Major Martin, NZAPC [New Zealand Army Pay Corps].*

**Thursday 30th April**

*Out to Menastir Area to buy eggs.*

*Very heavy dust storm.*

*Head wound very sore & dirty.*

*Sleepless night.*

*Heat & Dust terrible.*

**MAY**

**Friday 1st May**

*Very muggy morning.*

*To 2 Indian CCS & then in office all day.*

*Dust Bad.*

**Saturday 2nd May**

*To 2 Ind. CCS to have head dressed.*

*Office all day.*

*Very hot, clear day.*

**Sunday 3rd May**

*To CCS for head dressing.*

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<sup>234</sup> The present Halfaya-Sollum War Cemetery

<sup>235</sup> 2nd Lieutenant (later Major) William King of the NZ 21st Battalion

<sup>236</sup> 2nd Indian CCS was located in Sollum (Pillai, 1958, pp. 246–47)

<sup>237</sup> Probably Brigadier William Stevens. Elsewhere Stevens is referred to as Officer in Charge of Administration (OICA). What DAAC stands for is unknown

### **Monday 4th May**

*To CCS for head dressing & TAB inoculation (½ cc).*

*Dust very bad again.*

*Head bad & very muggy.*

*Light rain at 2000 hrs.*

*[UWD] 1 truck for fuel, light & disinfectant. Lts Hutchinson and King to Point 207 Area to locate graves reported by UDF officer. Capt. von Schramm and 7 ORs to CCS for TAB inoculation [several of whom were sick in bed the next day]. Severe dust storm blowing all day. Light rain began to fall at 2000 hrs.*

### **Tuesday 5th May**

*Heavy, short shower at 0500 hrs.*

*To CCS for head dressing.*

*To Kilo 6 Cemetery.*

*To Naafi & Field PO.*

### **Wednesday 6th May**

*To CCS.*

*To PO & RE Dump re. crosses from Cairo.*

### **Thursday 7th May**

*In camp all morning.*

*Major Dixon,<sup>238</sup> DAD, GRU, arrived.*

*To site of Salum New Cemetery — 6 Aust. Div. Cemetery, New Capuzzo cemetery & Rail Head. (RE Dump).*

*Very severe Air Raid on Salum & Capuzzo Areas. About 12 killed.*

*Fragments of HE [high explosive] shells landed in camp.*

*Clear night.*

### **Friday 8th May**

*To Capuzzo New Cemetery, Railhead & Field PO.*

*Office work.*

*Clear, calm day.*

Very, Very Hot.

!!!! the Flies.

[UWD] Major Dixon left for Sidi Rezegh. Lt Hutchinson to Buq Buq Area to exhume body of unknown RAF pilot. Lt King to Menastir Area. Self to Buq Buq to photograph two cemeteries. Thence to 6th Australian Div. cemetery near Salum to photograph crosses. To Railhead, Capuzzo, to collect two crates of permanent sign written crosses. Slight enemy air activity in Salum and Capuzzo Areas during night.

### **Saturday 9th May**

Getting new Mess Hut & Cookhouse erected.

Beautiful day.

To New Capuzzo Cemetery.

### **Sunday 10th May**

Camp all day.

### **Monday 11th May**

To Capuzzo Cemetery (New).

[UWD] Lt King to Menastir Area to search for graves. Self to New Capuzzo cemetery — registered graves of eight RA personnel killed as a result of enemy air activity at the Railhead Capuzzo. One truck to draw water. Fine clear day and very hot. Slight air activity.

### **Tuesday 12th May**

New Cemetery — Capuzzo — 86 Sub-Area — DADOS.

Staff Capt. "A".

ROO [Railhead Ordinance Officer] Dump to draw stores.

Paymaster to draw pay.

Field Post Office & FSD.

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<sup>238</sup> V.H. Dixon.

### **Wednesday 13th May**

*Temp. 93°F.*

*Office work all day.*

*[UWD] 1 truck to draw rations, petrol & oil. Lt King to 2 Indian CCS to have injured leg dressed (Injuries received when he slipped on rocks). Self compiling reports and attending to mail. Some of ORs finishing new Cookhouse and Mess Hut. Temperature reached 93°F — Very muggy — no wind. Cool night.*

### **Thursday 14th May**

*Temp. 112°F.*

*To Menastir Area — Bir Zembla.*

*[UWD] Lt King to CCS to have leg dressed and was in camp all day. Capt. von Schramm to Menastir I Area to search for 2NZEZ graves. Dusty day and very hot.*

### **Friday 15th May**

*Office in morning.*

*Capuzzo Cemetery after lunch.*

*FPO.*

*Field Hygiene Sect. [Section].*

*Major Dixon returned from Sidi Rezegh.*

*Great Dominoes Tournament.*

*Large Monitor in port (16" guns) escort of [escorted by] the ML [Motor Launch] Patrol Boat.*

### **Saturday 16th May**

*Office all day.*

*Heavy dust storm.*

*Temp. 110°F.*

*[UWD] Lt King to CCS to have leg dressed.<sup>239</sup> One truck to draw rations, etc. Office work all morning.*

*Visited by Captain (Padre) Clarke, 2 Scots Guards who buried numerous casualties in this area in '41. To Halifya [Halfaya] & Musaid Areas with Padre Clarke to locate and identify graves. Wind very cold, and dropping towards evening.*

### **Sunday 17th May**

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

*Dust still bad.*

*[UWD] Two NCOs arrived from 2 Div. HQ, UDF, at Gazala. They have come to assist in the locating of various isolated UDF graves in this Area.*

### **Monday 18th May**

*To Marsa Lucch Area.*

*Located Italian Hospital building & several cemeteries. Returned along coast. Caught in Salt Marsh. Hard job digging out.*

*Very heavy raid on Railhead, Capuzzo. Caught in it & did not get Home till 11.30 pm.*

*Close Shave.*

### **Tuesday 19th May**

*Canteen arrived*

*Capt. Lange, 5 GRU, arrived & left again for Matruh.*

*Movie show "Old Man River."<sup>240</sup> Indian Doctors & M [Military] Police present.*

### **Wednesday 20th May**

*Camp all day.*

*Capuzzo Cemetery & FPO & EFI.*

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<sup>239</sup> The Unit War Diary for the previous day described this as having "festered badly (Josland and Schramm, 1941–43)

<sup>240</sup> Presumably James Wale's 1936 musical "Showboat" in which the song 'Ol' Man River' features

**Thursday 21st May**

*To 80 Sub-Area re. New Fig Tree Wells Cemetery.*

*To new Capuzzo Cemetery.*

*FSD & FPO.*

*[UWD] Lt Hutchinson working eastwards from the Halfya [Halfaya] Pass Area. Lt King to Marsa el Ramla Area along Egypt-Libya frontier.*

**Friday 22nd May**

*My truck to Buq Buq for repairs to springs & hangar. To Italian cemetery by Bardia YMCA Roadhouse.*

*[UWD] Lt Hutchinson to Halfya [Halfaya] Pass with UDF Sgt to locate SAAF pilot's grave. Lt King to Bardia and then by Naval ML to Marsa el Ramla [sic] to lift body from sea and take it ashore for burial. I truck to Buq Buq for repairs. Self to Italian cemetery by YMCA Roadhouse on Bardia–Tobruch road. Some air activity over Salum during night. Clear, moonlight night.*

**Saturday 23rd May**

*Office work all day.*

**Friday 22nd & Saturday 23rd May**

*Enemy Air Activity Day & Night.*

**Sunday 24th May**

*Interior Economy — Bathing & Fishing.*

*Temp at 1300 hrs.*

*107°F.*

*Saw CRE [Commander Royal Engineers], Salum, re. survey of Fig Tree Site.*

**Monday 25th May**

*To Fig Tree Wells Cemetery Site. To 86 Sub-Area.*

*To DADOS & ROO.*



*FPO & Map Dept.*

*Collected Indian's body from 2 Ind. CCS & buried it at Kilo 6 Cemetery.*

***Tuesday 26th May***<sup>241</sup>

*Visited Hadfield Spears Hospital Unit (Free French) at Salum (English Nurses) (Too far forward for women)<sup>242</sup> re. burial of Free French soldier. Saw Padre Kelly.*

***Defence and retreat***

At the end of May, Rommel's army assaulted and attempted to outflank the allies' Gazala–Bir Hakeim line to the west of Tobruk. By the middle of the following month, after much fighting to-and-fro, allied command deemed the line no longer defensible and ordered a retreat, first to the Egyptian border, then Mersa Matruh and finally to El Alamein. What is most striking in the diary entries for this period is how little the unit's day-to-day work and routines were affected by these events. Was this command inertia? Or were Wally and his superiors at GREMEF persuaded that Rommel would fail, and that the allies would soon be back? For what it is worth, Wally's words suggest the latter. There is no hint that the "Gazala Gallop", as the retreat was known, was a major defeat; but there is reference to a future when forward areas would be clear for work again and just days before it was overrun, the unit was still fencing, pegging out plots at, and circulating instructions for the use of the new permanent concentration cemetery at Sollum (today's Halfaya-Sollum War Cemetery). Wally's one acknowledgement of the severity of the situation was on the eve of "Ash Wednesday", the day GHQ and the British Embassy in Cairo burned huge numbers of files in anticipation

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<sup>241</sup> Start of *Unternehmen Venezia*, the German and Italian assault on the Gazala/Bir Hakeim line

<sup>242</sup> The *Hôpital chirurgical mobile 3 ambulance Hadfield-Spears* was an Anglo-French volunteer unit. It was funded by the British tycoon, Sir Robert Hadfield. Mary Spears (the American writer Mary Borden) was in charge of the unit's female personnel

of the arrival of the Axis armies,<sup>243</sup> when he remarked in his personal diary: "WD situation pretty sticky." In the long run of course the allies were to return, and in Wally's later descriptions of the build-up of allied matériel, we begin to see this realised. But at the time of the retreat, the unit's ongoing work was an expression of faith as much anything else.

### **Wednesday 27th May**

*Big Tank Battle gets going at Bir Hakeim. Huns striking towards El Adem & Tobruch. Heavy fighting at Sidi Rezegh.*

*Y, 5 [&] 1 GRUs escaped. Some officers & ORs in the "Bag".*

*All escapees from advanced GRUs reported to me — Under my command. Lost all gear & mostly in a "Flat Spin".*

*Heavy Air Raids Day & Night.*

*Many wounded coming back & heavy reinforcements going up to Front.*

[Wally's Unit War Diary for the 27th of May conflated the events reported by him in his personal diary:] *Lt King to Fd [Field] Workshops and Ordinance Field Park at Buq Buq and to locate graves in Area. Capt. von Schramm & Lt King to Hadfield Spears Hospital Unit, Salum Bay, re. deceased French soldier. To 2 Indian CCS re. completion of AF W3314 in respect of deceased Indian Soldier. Two officers & 11 ORs of "Y" GRU arrived, having had to evacuate Sidi Rezegh Area owing to enemy advance. Large numbers of RAF planes heading eastwards over Salum at dusk. Very hot day. Temp 100°F on desert. Two more Graves Registration Sections arrived during the night from Sidi Rezegh Area.*

### **Thursday 28th May**

*More "bits & pieces" of GRUs arrived through night. Conference at HQ, UDF, LOB [Left out of Battle], re. defence plans.*

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<sup>243</sup> Cooper, 1989, p. 195

*Capt. Lange [5 GRU] arrived from Matruh with message of appreciation of my work in emergency, from Col. Paton.*

### **Friday 29th May**

*To New Fig Tree Wells Cemetery. Big Air Raid at Salum. Fencing Cemetery site. Conference with OC, Salum "Box", re. our part in defence. More Air raids at dusk & during night.*

*Full moon 30/5/42.*

*I off. [officer] [&] 2 ORs of 2 GRU reported. I now have 8 officers & 22 ORs to defend coast from Salum Pier to Beacon Point.*

*Conference with Major Rooke, UDF LOB HQ, re. Defence of Solum [sic].*

### **Saturday 30th May**

*Full Moon.*

*To Conference at 86 Sub-Area.*

*To Conference at HQ, UDF LOB, Salum.*

*Patrols out every night from now till "Relax".*

### **Sunday 31st May**

*To LOB UDF HQ to draw Ammo & Hand Grenades.*

*Interior Economy.*

*To 2 Indian CCS to collect Hun POW. Buried in Kilo 6 Cemetery.*

*Continuous air raids all night.*

## **JUNE**

### **Monday 1st June**

*Office work. To HQ, UDF LOB, re. rations & reserve Iron Rations.*

*To Capuzzo New Cemetery.*

*Heavy Enemy Air Bombardment. All night.*

*Very clear night — Very muggy & oppressive.*

*[UWD] Lts Hutchinson & King to Kilo 6 Cemetery & to collect angle pickets. Then to Salum (Fig Tree Wells) Concentration Cemetery and completed boundary fence. Capt. von Schramm to HQ, LOB UDF, and to New Capuzzo*

*Cemetery. One truck to LOB, UDF, to draw rations. One truck to draw Petrol & to APO [Army Post Office], 80 FSD. Patrols out at night. Enemy air raids commenced at dusk.*

### **Tuesday 2nd June**

*To 30 SAEC [South African Army Engineer Corps] re. charging of battery. Then pegged out plots in New Fig Tree Wells Cemetery. Had to cease work at 1230 hrs owing to excessive heat.*

*Temperature steadily mounted till at 118°F.*

*Terrific dust storm started & at height at 1830 hrs.*

### **Wednesday 3rd June**

*Office Work. To Capuzzo Cemetery & FPO.*

*Heavy Air Raids all night (mostly in Hellfire Area).*

*Busy Night.*

### **Thursday 4th June**

*To Hadfield Speers Hospital (Free French) & 2 Indian CCS re. burial returns.*

*Quiet night up till 2359 hrs. — Heavy raids after midnight. Petrol dump blown up across Bay.*

*Huge Blaze & many explosions.*

### **Friday 5th June**

*Heavy air raids from 0330 hrs.*

*To 30 SAEC Workshops & Salum New Cemetery — To Capuzzo.*

*Conference of all GRU officers & allotted them each work for time being till own Areas clear again.*

*[The Unit War Diary for this day expresses the latter differently] Considerable air activity from 0330 hrs. Number of bombs dropped in Area. Lt Hutchinson and Section to Sidi Azeiz Area to erect inscribed crosses & fieldwork. (Camping at Sidi Azeiz). Lt King laid up by injury to ankle — to CCS. Self to 30 SAEC Workshops & Capuzzo New Cemetery. Major Peek arrived from Matruh.*

*Conference of all GRU officers & re-allotment of areas till forward areas clear for work again. Quiet night.*

### **Saturday 6th June**

*To New Salum Cemetery with DAD, Major Peek, G.*

*To 86 Sub-Area re. Coons to dig at Salum.*

*Quiet night.*

*[UWD] To New Fig Tree Wells Cemetery with DAD.*

*To Capuzzo Cemetery & 86 Sub-Area re. labour for*

*Fig Tree Wells work. Lt King in camp with bad ankle*

*— Lt King evacuated to 2 Indian CCS. Lt Hutchinson & party returned from Sidi Azeiz Area.*

### **Sunday 7th June**

*To Railhead re. "Coons" for digging. To 30 SAEC Workshops. To Signal office.*

### **Monday 8th June**

*My Beloved's Birthday.*

*To 30 SAEC Workshop & pegged out some plots in New Salum Cemetery. To UDF LOB HQ.*

*Office Work.*

*Quiet night.*

### **Tuesday 9th June**

*To 30 SAEC Workshop & then working at New Salum Cemetery. DAD (Peek) left for Barrani.*

*Office Work.*

*Very Hot 118°F.*

*Quiet night.*

*Very Muggy.*

### **Wednesday 10th June**

*Office all day.*

*Buried one Indian in Kilo 6 Cemetery in evening & 1 OR in Salum*

*Military Cemetery.*

*Pte Brown, J. 2 West Yorks Regt.<sup>244</sup>*

*Quiet night — Close.*

#### **Thursday 11th June**

*Office all day. Truck away for Rations & Petrol. Lt Hutchinson off to El Zannan & other cemeteries.*

*Fine day — Clear & Hot.*

*Very muggy night.*

*Slept outside.*

#### **Friday 12th June**

*To Salum Cemetery — Burial of South African Officer by Padre Knight — Dutch Reform Church.*

*Very Hot day.*

*Visited all Hospitals & other Red + [Red Cross] Units in Area re. New Cemetery.*

*To Sub-Area — FSD, Naafi & APO.*

*[UWD] Lt [Hutchinson] still away at El Zannan Cemetery.*

*Self to Salum Military Cemetery & Capuzzo New Cemetery.*

*To all Red Cross Units in Salum Area re. use of New Salum Cemetery. Very hot day & close at night. Col. T. King, NZAOC [New Zealand Army Ordinance Department], called.*

#### **Saturday 13th June<sup>245</sup>**

*Salum Cemetery & then Office Work.*

*Very Heavy Air Raids on coast — Daba — Matruh.*

#### **Sunday 14th June**

*Camp all day.*

#### **Monday 15th June**

*Salum Cemetery.*

*Sub-Area (86).*

*Office Work.*

[UWD] *To Salum Cemetery, Capuzzo New Cemetery & 86 Sub-Area. 1 truck for rations. 1 Truck to workshops for brake repairs. Office work. Lt Hutchinson to Salum—Buq Buq Coast Rd Area & exhumed & identified bodies. Hospitals, Naafi & other Units moving back to Misheifa.*

## **Tuesday 16th June**

*Salum Cemetery — Buried 3 bodies. 2 English, 1 UDF.<sup>246</sup>*

*Very Heavy Air Raids during night of 16/17.*

## **Wednesday 17th June**

*Intense bombing of Salum Area all night & on into daylight.*

*Temperature very High.*

## **Thursday 18th June**

*Capuzzo New Cemetery.*

*Salum Cemetery.*

*Gap “A” closed.*

*Bay simply alive with 6” Guns & M3 Tanks (Grant).*

*Troops from Libya fall back into Salum & Hellfire boxes.*

*Intense air bombardment all night on Bay Area.*

*Much dive bombing by Stukas & lots of searchlights & AA fire.*

## **Friday 19th June**

*Panzer Column attacked Salum — retired after 2 hrs heavy fighting.*

*From 1st Light Unit packed, & moved out at 1330 hrs. Caves taken over by R [Royal] Navy Detachment.*

*Unit bivouacked 3 miles E of Sidi Barrani.*

[UWD] *To Signal office, UDF, LOB. To draw rations. APO closed & evacuated to Misheifa Railhead. FSD closed &*

<sup>244</sup> James Brown, aged 19, had died that day. The Unit War Diary for the 10th of June, which does not name Brown, notes that his was the first burial in “Salum” cemetery

<sup>245</sup> “Black Saturday” when the Knightsbridge Box collapsed

<sup>246</sup> The Unit War Diary for this date refers to the burial of “3 ORs (English Units)”

*moved back. Back to camp & packed all equipment & office. Standing by for instructions. Troops from Libyan side of Frontier falling back into Salum "Box". Many AFV Lighters standing by in Bay. Salum Box alive with troops, trucks & tanks. Enemy columns moving across desert towards our L o C. Strong patrols of Fighter planes constantly overhead. Salum and Halfaya. Passes very congested with tanks coming back and heavy guns moving forward.*

### **Saturday 20th June**

*On to Mersa Matruh. Reported to [5] GRU & to 8th Army HQ (A [Administrative] Branch).*

*Maori Bn detraining at Matruh.*

*Unit on to El Daba. Met 4th Fd [Field] Regt (NZ).*

*Camped on beach about 4 miles E of Daba.*

*Grand swimming in moonlight.*

### **Sunday 21st June<sup>247</sup>**

*On to Maadi. NZ Division moving up all day after epic convoy trip — over 200 miles per day from*

*Syria.*

*Unit at Reception Depot Maadi at 1730 hrs.*

### **Monday 22nd June**

*Reported to HQ, 2NZE, to MS [Military Secretary] — Major Hedge — & Base Pay Office.*

### **Hiatus**

Returning to Maadi, Wally and the NZGREU were at a loose end, no contingency plans having been made for their employment in the event of retreat. Only after several weeks and many visits to HQ was a detachment deployed to work on cemeteries in the Alexandria area. Eventually, however, the unit was ordered back to the desert.

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<sup>247</sup> The fall of Tobruk



In August, it was based at El Deir outside Alexandria; in September/October, a little further west. During this period we see sections of it working behind the central sector of the El Alamein line; between El Hamman and Alexandria; at Amiriya (which Wally persistently spells Amriya); and along the Cairo–Alexandria desert road, where several Landing Grounds were located. Then in November, after the Second Battle of El Alamein, it shifted to the southern sector of the El Alamein Line, where it remained for the rest of Wally's time as Officer in Command (**Figure 58**). The diary for this period is characterised by repeated mentions of long journeys, and for Wally (if not the rest of the unit), repeated visits to Alexandria and Cairo. Of note also are mentions of the build-up and movement of allied matériel between the First and Second Battles of El Alamein, of incidents during—and changes in the nature of—the air campaign, and memorable descriptions of the unit's Christmas and New Year in the desert.

### **Tuesday 23rd June**

*Drew cash & paid men ready for leave.*

*Sent draft of £20 to Dad (£25 in NZ).*

*To Base PO.*

*Lunch with Major Allan [Alban] Knapp.*

### **Wednesday 24th June**

*To Base Pay Office.*

*To HQ, GRE, MEF.*

*To Base Post Office.*

*Lunch at NZ Club.*

*[UWD] 5 ORs marched out on leave. Lt Hutchinson to Base Ordinance Workshops re. trucks. Self to Base Pay Office, to Directorate of GRE, MEF, [&] to Base Post Office.*

### **Thursday 25th June**

*Marched out on Leave.*

*Roomed at NZ Club.*

*Lunch with Postal Officers.*

**Friday 26th June**

*Round Town & to Base Post Office. To Stella Bar with Postal Officers & then to Lunch at their Pension.*

*To Office of DAD, GRE, ME.*

**Saturday 27th June**

*Various shopping Expeditions. Spent Some time at Base PO.*

*Spent Evening with Morriss & Mrs Cohen at their Flat.<sup>248</sup>*

**Sunday 28th June**

*Round town — to PO. To Musky [Mouski] Bazaar & bought presents for Home.*

**Monday 29th June**

*To Maadi — Helwan & Heliopolis.*

*Returned to Club to find All Leave cancelled. Packed & back to Maadi.*

*Enemy at El Alamein.*

**Tuesday 30th June<sup>249</sup>**

*Business around Maadi All Day.*

*WD situation pretty sticky. Much unrest among Civilians in Cairo.*

*Everyone in Forces fully armed at all times in case of trouble with Waughs<sup>250</sup> [sic] in Cairo.*

**JULY**

**Wednesday 1st July<sup>251</sup>**

*Round Maadi Camp.*

*To Heliopolis.*

*[UWD] Lt Hutchinson & self to Cairo re. photographs for renewal of Identity cards. To base Post Office. To 2 Echelon, 2NZE. To DAD, GRE, GHQ, ME. Standing by under 12 hours notice to proceed Palestine.*

**Thursday 2nd July**

*Hutchinson marched out, Posted to "Commando".<sup>252</sup>*

*To see Military Secretary & HQ, 2 Echelon.  
To Helwan in evening to see Armenian Friends.<sup>253</sup>*

### **Friday 3rd July**

*Drew Pay & Paid men.  
To base PO.  
Shopping & then to HQ, GRE, Heliopolis.  
To Heliopolis Sporting Club.  
Back to Maadi.*

### **Saturday 4th July**

*New officer Marched In. 2 Lt Mathews, D.B.<sup>254</sup>  
Self to Base PO with mail.  
Back to Camp.  
WD Situation improving.  
Unit under notice to move to Gaza. Palestine.*

### **Sunday 5th July**

*To Chief Post Office & Lunch at Club.  
  
Back to Camp.*

### **Monday 6th July**

*To DAD, GRE, ME.  
To P [Post] Office.  
  
Camp in Evening.*

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<sup>248</sup> Morriss Michael Cohen of 16 Sharia Malika Farida, Cairo (Morriss' Bookshop)

<sup>249</sup> Start of the first battle of El Alamein

<sup>250</sup> Waugh = Wog. This meaning is made clear in a later diary entry

<sup>251</sup> Cairo's "Ash Wednesday"

<sup>252</sup> The Unit War Diary for this date refers to Henderson being "transferred to NZ reception Depot"

<sup>253</sup> Onnig Tchakedjian of 6 Fouad I(st), Cairo (presumably Sharia Fouad el Awal—now 26th of July Street)

<sup>254</sup> Lt Douglas Mathews of the NZ 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion. Mathews was killed during a dive-bombing attack on the 4th of September 1942, during the fighting at Deir el Munassib

[UWD] To DAD, GRE, MEF. Cpl Burt rejoined Unit from Tour of Duty at GRE, MEF, and replaced there by Cpl Hinton. 2 Lt Mathews marched out to MG [Machine Gun] Reifs [Reinforcements] and Lt Roydhouse marched In.<sup>255</sup>  
Posted. Very severe dust storm.

**Tuesday 7th July**

Office Work & visited Chief Post Office.

Camp in Evening.

**Wednesday 8th July**

Just Repetition of Previous Days Routine.

**Thursday 9th July**

To Heliopolis & Base PO.

Had daily pre-lunch bottle of beer with PO Lads.

[UWD] Lt Overton Posted to Unit. Unit cook transferred to NZ Reception Depot & Pte Pidwell marched in from 22 Bn LOB.

**Friday 10th July**

Town to do a spot of shopping & to Post Office.

Town in Evening.

Lunch & tea at New Zealand Club.

**Saturday 11th July**

Office Work all day.

Temperature B— Awful. Sweating something bad.

Home in evening.

**Sunday 12th July**

To Church Service at NZ Chief Post Office.

Lunch at Club.

**Monday 13th July**

To Heliopolis office.

*UDF GRUs have made a terrible mess of registrations in the Sidi Rezegh Area Cemeteries.*

*NZ GRU given task of untangling mess.*

## **Tuesday 14th July**

*Routine office Work all Day. Terrible Heat.*

*Situation near Alamein still so-so.*

*Lunch in Town & then back to Camp.*

## **Wednesday 15th July**

*Office work all morning & Siesta in afternoon.*

*Tea in Town & Club.*

## **Thursday 16th July [16 circled]**

*To Heliopolis office.*

*To Base PO.*

*Back to Camp.*

*To Morriss Cohen's at Shubra<sup>256</sup> for Birthday Celebration. Arrived back at Maadi at 2359 hrs after a real Jolly Evening & Party.*

*[UWD] Routine office work. Instructing new officers in methods of Graves Registration. Conference at DAD, GRE, ME, in connection with detachment to work at Alexandria and Amiriya Cemeteries.*

## **Friday 17th July**

*In Camp All Day.*

*Roydhouse sent off to Alexandria (Hadra<sup>257</sup> & Amiriya Cemeteries).*

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<sup>255</sup> Lieutenant Garth Roydhouse, of the NZ 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion. Born in 1910, Roydhouse was another relatively old Lieutenant. He was a journalist with a particular interest in archaeology and Maori and early NZ history. A correspondent of the NZ anthropologist Peter Buck, after the war, he edited the NZ Financial Times and was Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Journal of the Polynesian Society

<sup>256</sup> In northern Cairo

<sup>257</sup> A WWI cemetery reopened in 1941

**Saturday 18th July**

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

*To Chief Post office with & to collect mail.*

**Sunday 19th July**

*In town — shopping.*

**Monday 20th July**

*To Post office.*

*To DAD, GRE, & saw Brigadier Sir Herbert Hart, Imperial War Graves Commission.*

**Tuesday 21st July**

*Office Work & to DAD.*

**Wednesday 22nd July**

*Office Work & DAD.*

**Thursday 23rd July**

*To Mena to Moslem Military Cemetery.<sup>258</sup> Erected inscribed stakes.*

*[UWD] Detachment working at Hadra, Chatby<sup>259</sup> & Amiriya Military cemeteries, Alexandria. Rest of Unit to Mena to locate Moslem cemeteries and erect stakes.*

**Friday 24th July**

*Office Work.*

*Drew Pay & Paid All Ranks.*

**Saturday 25th July**

*Post Office — Shopping.*

*DAD, GRE, Mid East & to BTE Map Depot.*

**Sunday 26th July**

*Interior Economy.*

*Town & Shopping.*

**Monday 27th July**

*Went to Alexandria via Delta. Enjoyable trip. Booked in at Syracuse Hotel.*

*Air Raid at night.*

**Tuesday 28th July**

*To Hadra Cemetery.*

*Chatby Cemetery & Amiriya old & new cemeteries.*

*Air Raid at night.*

*Interesting ruins at Chatby Cemetery & fine old Franciscan Chapel.*

**Wednesday 29th July**

*Hadra Cemetery & left for Cairo at 1400 hrs.*

*5 hrs drive to Maadi. Very nice trip through Delta.*

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*Very heavy Air Raid over Cairo. Some deaths & damage.*

*Direct hit on Hangar at Heliopolis drome. 4 killed.*

**Thursday 30th July**

*Two trucks in shop. Office work all day.*

*To DAD in evening.*

*Orders to proceed to front at El Alamein.*

*[UWD] Truck to workshops for new spark plugs. Engine broken owing to sheer carelessness on part of workshop personnel. To conference at Graves Directorate, GHQ, Mid East. Received instructions to proceed to 13 Corps HQ but unable to [get] moving owing to lack of transport.*

**Friday 31st July**

*To Pay Office & 6 Div's Ord. [Ordinance] Workshops — To HQ, 2NZE.*

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<sup>258</sup> The remains of soldiers buried at Mena were later removed to Heliopolis

<sup>259</sup> Another WWI cemetery used in WW2

*To Cairo & Post Office.*

*Tea at Club.*

*Shopping.*

*Close, muggy night.*

*Air raid from 0400–0530. Heaviest raid yet on Cairo Area. Searchlight gunned by Hun plane. Much intense bombing.*

## AUGUST

### **Saturday 1st August**

*Doing weekly returns & war Diary for July.*

*Town in evening to shop.*

*To chez-lui with Onnig Tchakedjian. Mrs Tchakedjian's Birthday — marvellous Dinner & enjoyable evening (French Conversation).*

### **Sunday 2nd August**

*Packing Unit Equipment ready to move to WD.*

*Writing in evening.*

*Strong wind blowing. Very Hot & close.*

### **Monday 3rd August**

*Packed all equipment. My truck returned from Base W/Shops. Sent baggage to Base Kit Store.*

*Writing in evening.*

### **Tuesday 4th August**

*Left Maadi at 0920. All well till nearing Damanher<sup>260</sup> when draw-bar on one trailer snapped off. Great job making a temporary hitch & towed trailer back to Kafr el Zayat, to South African Rly Construct. Coys W/Shops. Arrived 1930 hrs. Messed with UDF officers. Very good. Good night's sleep under nets owing to mosquitoes & sandflies.*

*S Fly Fever very bad here.*

*Grandmother Boswell Died today.*

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<sup>260</sup> In the western Nile delta



**El Alamein****Wednesday 5th August**

*Work proceeding on repairs to trailer.*

*Writing letters.*

*Left at 1300 hrs & proceeded to Alexandria — arrived at Hadra Military Cemetery at 1730 hrs. Saw Lt Roydhouse. Onto El Deir area & selected Camp site at MR 49259282.*

*Bivvied for night.*

**Thursday 6th August**

*Made camp & erected tents.*

*Gyppo AA Lookout Post right Alongside. 2 Waugh soldiers most helpful.*

*Well settled in.*

*Much gunfire forward.*

**Friday 7th August**

*With 2 ORs, set off for 13 Corps. To El Hamman on Coast Rd Via Petrol tin — “C” & Δ tracks to 13 Corps Rear HQ.*

*Saw DAAG [Deputy Assistant Adjutant General]. On to Rear NZ Div. HQ.*

*Saw DAAG, Capt. Burge. [Barge?]*

*Back to NZ MDS. Bivvied for night. Much Gunfire & Air Activity all night.*

*Slept well.*

**Saturday 8th August**

*To NZ MDS Cemetery at Point 102 (Figure 57).*

*Registered All Graves. Stencilled & Erected crosses.*

*Flies in unbelievable nos.*

*5 hrs at 102 cemetery.*

*Graves Oiled for Anti-Fly Protection.*

*(Futile)*

*Lunch at MDS & then forward to 4 & 6 Fd Amb. [Field Ambulance]*

*ADS & did Cemetery there & then on to Bde Areas & did isolated graves.*

*Dinner at MDS. To 7 Armd. Div. Area & located Large cemetery. On rock — no burials — just cairns.*



**Figure 57**

NZ MDS cemetery at Point 102 (photo: Walter von Schramm)

*Flies — Nuff said.*

*To MDS with Father Forsman<sup>262</sup> & then along “O” Track & Bivvied for night.*

*Quiet night.*

*[UWD] To NZ MDS Military cemetery at Point 102 (MR 42808815). Registered graves (65). Stencilled & erected crosses. To MDS for lunch. To 4 Fd Amb. & 6 Fd Amb., (NZ) ADS, and registered 18 graves in NZ ADS Cemetery at MR 88502710.<sup>263</sup> Stencilled & erected crosses. To DAAG, Rear NZ Div. Registered isolated graves in Rear Div. HQ. To MDS for dinner & remained overnight.*

### **Sunday 9th August**

*Great Air Raid & Artillery work in early morning.*

*Left for 13 Corps. Lot of trouble on sand tracks.*

*From Corps HQ to Hamman & thence to Base Camp.  
 Very tired & Filthy.  
 Good & Welcome Wash.  
 Found heap of parcels awaiting me — Good 'O!  
 Slept Well.*

### **Monday 10th August**

*In Camp All day doing 3372s & Weekly returns.  
 Visited by Lt Bill McLure [McClure] from NZ FPO — mail.  
 Maori PT<sup>264</sup> in Afternoon.*

### **Tuesday 11th August**

*To 8th Army Rear HQ. Saw Col. Paton who endorsed my Plans.  
 That fixes those Blighters up forward.  
 To NZ FPO.  
 To Alex. Drew Pay.  
 Dinner in town.  
     Home & wrote to Dear Eva.*

### **Wednesday 12th August**

*Paid troops.  
 Did Acquittance Rolls.<sup>265</sup>  
 Preparing for trip to Desert Tomorrow.  
 Much Air Activity.*

### **Thursday 13th August**

*Self & Harry Overton & 4 ORs left for 13 Corps. Area.  
 Coast Road to El Hamman & via Petrol tin track to "C" track. Followed*

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<sup>262</sup> The poet, Edward Forsman. Father Forsman was attached to the NZ 5 Main Dressing Station

<sup>263</sup> These apparently widely divergent grid references relate to two different grids, the purple belt grid to the west, and the red belt grid to the east. In fact the two sites are within 10–12 kilometres of each other

<sup>264</sup> Maori PT = siesta (Judd, 2003, p. 42)

<sup>265</sup> Army Payroll



track to NZ MDS.

MDS shifting back about 8 m. 25 pdr Regt in position around 102 Cemetery. Graves at Pt 102. On by very bad track to Mirbat Aza British Cemetery. Reg. [registered] & Crossed 68 graves.<sup>265</sup> On East & bivvied overnight in Wadi (Deir el Ragil). Tank Corps & AT [anti-tank] Regt moved into area in night.

### **Friday 14th August**

Tanks of all classes in Battle Formation as far as eye could see & AT Guns in all suitable positions. On Eastwards by circuitous route to Pt 149 & thence to 93 FMC [Forward Maintenance Centre]. From here we followed Axis ♦ track to 86 FMC & then C track to El Hamman — Down coast Rd to Home and Peace (?)

Lots of Air activity.

Rommel expected to move at weekend.

Are we ready for him?

*I'll Say!*

[UWD] To 7 Armoured Divisional Area & to 15 Light Fd Ambulance (British). To 13 Corps (Rear) HQ. Returned to Camp via El Hamman & Coast Rd. Called at Base Camp of UDF No 2 GRU.

### **Saturday 15th August**

Doing Registration Reports W3372 & Weekly Returns all day.

Lot of Artillery fire & MG fire from planes in neighbourhood.

All hands very cheeky & hoping that "Push" will start.

### **Sunday 16th August**

Camp all day.

2 trucks to workshops to have new springs fitted.

Interior Economy & Recreation.

NZ Mail expected daily — Yippee!

### **Figure 58**

The NZGREU's areas of operation in the El Alamein and Alexandria areas (see Appx 5 for details of numbered cemeteries)

### **Monday 17th August**

*To 8th Army Wireless Dept to collect Unit Radio Set. To map Depot to draw maps.*

*To Col. Paton (AAG) [Assistant Adjutant General] 8th Army. Camp for Lunch.*

*Into Alexandria to Main Rly Stn.*

*To NZ Advanced Pay Office & to Hadra Cemetery.*

*Tea in town & then back to Camp.*

*No NZ Mail yet. Is it in Cairo?*

### **Tuesday 18th August**

*Harry left for Beirut for leave & reunion with his wife (7 days). Self in camp all day.*

*Office work & letter writing.*

*At last — our long awaited “Home” mail has arrived. Very fast passage.*

*37 days to us in desert. Almost as good as an Airmail. Good Old*

*Merchant Mariners.*

*Letters. Eva — 6 & 1 Cable.*

*Mum — 2*

*Winnie — 1.*

*Bruce Wright 1.*

*Very upset to hear from my Beloved that she has had long & Serious illness. What joy to receive cable of her recovery once more. God bless her.*

### **Wednesday 19th August**

*Office work all day.*

*Answering my Beloved Eva's letters.*

### **Thursday 20th August**

*Camp in morning — office work.*

*Town after lunch — To NZ Pay office, Alexandria, to draw Imprest Cash for Pay.*

*Spent afternoon exploring parts of Alex. not visited before.*

*Left Hadra Cemetery at 2045 for Camp — Tired but enjoyed trip.*

Bought 2 oke<sup>267</sup> grapes 5½ lbs.  
 1 oke bananas — 2¾ lbs.

### Friday 21st August

Office work & letter writing all day. Trucks to draw rations, light<sup>268</sup> and Fuel.

Air raid in Alex. & later on Amiriya Drome. Lasted for several hours. Little bombing but loads of AA Fire.

Very clear moonlit night.

Cold wind.

One Jerry plane shot down into sea by Beaufighter.

Shot up one engine till on fire. Shot up other engine & plane crashed into sea. Burning oil & wreckage on water for some times afterwards.

### Saturday 22nd August

Office work & letter writing all day.

Desert Sores on left knee, almost better.

First Hun plane over at 2130 hrs. Dropped Flashlight Flares from Amiriya Camp to Amiriya Drome and beyond towards Half Way House, Wadi el Natrun.

Some heavy bombs dropped by later planes. Raiders coming in continuously at about 5 minute intervals.

2359 hrs.

Beaufighters up on Patrol.

### Sunday 23rd August

In camp all day. Sent off Weekly Returns. Office work. Interior Economy.

Bill McLure [McClure] came over from Field Post Office, Amiriya.

Plenty of Jerries over at night. Lots of Anti-Personnel bombs.

### Monday 24th August

Office work all day.

Heavy air raids from 2100 hrs.

---

<sup>267</sup> Oke or oka = Ottoman unit of measurement

<sup>268</sup> ?Kerosene

*Anti-personnel bombs dropping in all directions.  
Looks as though we are in for a very hectic night.  
At any rate — very disturbed night.  
Very Heavy Artillery Fire from El Alamein.*

*[UWD] One truck to draw rations. Lt Roydhouse — routine work at Hadra & Chatby Military Cemeteries, Alexandria.  
Capt. von Schramm — office work. Compiling lists of Isolated Sites in 13 Corps Area. Much enemy air activity over Alexandria and Amiriya Areas. Many Anti-Personnel bombs.*

## **Tuesday 25th August**

*Enemy air raids till early in the morning & then RAF took a hand. 3 Huns destroyed.*

*Two trucks & all men to vicinity of Half Way House, near Wadi Natrun — Located two plots. 10 Graves in one & 4 in other.*

*Little enemy activity at night. Night fighters on the job.*

*Plague of Anopheline [anopheline] “Skeeters”. Well & truly bitten. Boys also bitten.*

*[UWD] To El Ghayata Area in search of graves near Alex— Cairo Desert Road. Located two small plots at Kilos 43 & 49 from Alexandria. Registered graves. Lt Overton rejoined Unit from Leave of Absence.*

## **Wednesday 26th August**

*Full Moon*

*Camp all day.*

*Office work & painting new Unit signs on vehicle & sign boards (Figure 59).*

*Light Air Activity — Some bombs.*

*Cool night. East wind &*

*“SKEETERS”.*



**Thursday 27th August**

Office in morning.

Alex. after lunch to draw Pay. Leave till 2030 hrs.

Alex. Out of Bounds till further notice.

Activity in Desert.

Slight Stomach pains at night.

**Friday 28th August**

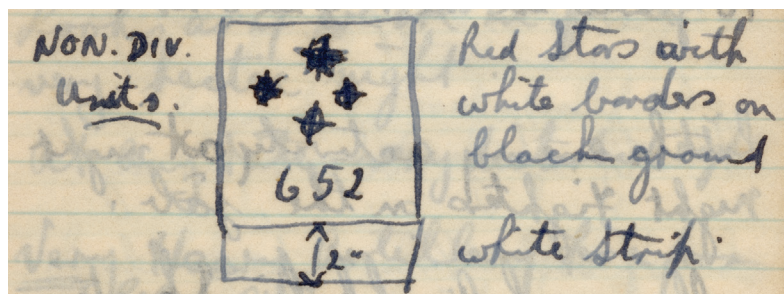
Ill with Dysentery.

In camp all day.

Very heavy air raids from 2100 hrs. 1 stick of five bombs dropped just over hill by Dive Bomber. Ju 88 shot down near camp.

Very ill at night.

Motions very frequent & non-solid.



**Figure 59**

Sketch in Wally's personal diary showing the unit sign. Scale 150%

**Saturday 29th August**

Very ill all day.

Passing much blood & little else in motions.

Bad night — no sleep.

No food.

**Sunday 30th August<sup>269</sup>**

Very ill — no Improvement. Much blood Passed.

Heavy raids at night.

### **Monday 31st August**

*Slight improvement. Confined to tent still.*

*Very severe raids on Alex. (Figure 60), Amiriya & Cairo.*

*2 x Ju 88 shot down, One near El Mreir (3 miles away).*

*Great & Welcome Sight.*



**Figure 60**

Bomb damage in Alexandria (photo: British Pathe)

## **SEPTEMBER**

### **Tuesday 1st September**

*Still confined to camp but a little better. Air Activity commenced at 2100 hrs. No moon. Strong Dust Storm.*

### **Wednesday 2nd September**

*Rather better but in camp all day.*

---

<sup>269</sup> Start of the Battle of Alam Halfa

**Thursday 3rd September**

*Camp all Day.*

*Almost OK again.*

—  
*Air Activity — 3 Itals shot [down] nearby in daytime.*

**Friday 4th September**

*A little off colour.*

*To Alexandria — Mustapha Barracks. Drew Pay.*

*Shopping in City.*

*Called at NZ YMCA Hostel.*

*Met Mrs Spence.*

*Strong Dust Blow at El Deir.*

**Saturday 5th September**

*Camp All Day.*

*Office Work & doing Weekly Returns.*

**Sunday 6th September**

*Harry & I to Alex. to St Marks & St Andrews. Too late for Service.*

*To NZ YMCA. Lunch with Mrs Spence.*

*Spot of Shopping & then to Camp.*

*Packing for move tomorrow.*

**Monday 7th September**

*Moved Unit to 86 Sub-Area 'tween Burg el Arab & Hamman. Erected tents & commenced to dig in. Orders to leave Area — to be rest Camp for 2 NZ Div. Moved back into 65 Sub-Area to site in Oasis, 36 Kilos. from Alex. on coast side of road.*

—  
Note

*Hurricane chased by Me 109 at Burg el Arab. Jerry shooting with cannon. No fire from our plane. Flak opened up. Hun retreated. Our plane hit by our own "Flak" & crashed into sea.*

[UWD] 2 ORs supervising burials at Hadra Cemetery. Lt Roydhouse rejoined Unit from being attached I6 Area, Delta Force. Unit moved from El Deir to Burg el Arab to a site at 52 Kilos from Alexandria. This site part of Area to be new 8th Army Rest Camp, so Unit moved to new site, approximately 36 Kilos from Alexandria at MR 48189215 (in 65 Sub-Area). Made camp in small grove of palms.

### **Tuesday 8th September**

Ration Day. Dug tents in.

Harry saw Col. Paton, AAG, at 8th Army. Unit ordered to remain at present camp till further orders.

Capt. Lange, OC, 5 GRU, called.

### **Wednesday 9th September**

Camp all day.

Lt McLure [McClure] called with mail.

Padre (Father RC) Henlay called with Burial returns.

Bill McLure [McClure] called again on way back from Division.

Strong wind blowing & temperature dropping.

Cable from Dear Eva. "Well again". Letters & Parcels arrived

God Bless Her.

### **Thursday 10th September**

To 86 Sub-Area.

To 5 GRU to collect 500 temporary crosses.

Quiet night.

### **Friday 11th September**

In Camp all day.

Some Air Activity Night.

### **Saturday 12th September**

Harry Overton & Self to Hadra Cemetery & to NZ Advanced Base

Cashier, Mustapha Barracks.

Shopping in Alex.

*Lunch at YMCA Hostel with Mrs Spence & Ken Thornton. Home before dark.*

*[UWD] Capt. von Schramm & Lt Overton to Mustapha Barracks & Hadra Military Cemetery. Lt Roydhouse in camp. ORs painting crosses. Capt. Loew called & delivered case of Inscribed crosses for Mirbat Aza Cemetery.*

### **Sunday 13th September**

*Camp All Day.*

*Doing Weekly Returns.*

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

### **Monday 14th September**

*Camp all day doing office Work.*

*One truck to draw rations, petrol, water etc. Two trucks in the field. One — Lt Roydhouse — to Abu el Matamir Area to RAF Landing Ground [LG] 226. Lt Overton to RAF LG 154 in Alam Shaltut Area. Graves located in both places.*

### **Tuesday 15th September**

*Office Work all day.*

*Harry laid up with bad back.*

*My back very sore.*

*Severe headaches at nights & in mornings.*

*Jerry Planes Over.*

*Ack-Ack nose cap falls in Camp.*

*[UWD] Capt. von Schramm — office work. Lt Overton indisposed with severe back pains. Lt Roydhouse to Wadi Natrun to RAF Landing Ground 100 & vicinity of Lake Ga'ar in search of crashed RAF plane & bodies of airmen.*

### **Wednesday 16th September**

*To HQ, 5 GRU, & 86 Sub-Area.*

*Office Work for rest of Day.  
Huns bombing early in night.  
Dug self a slit trench.*

**Thursday 17th September**

*In Camp all morning.  
To Hadra cemetery after lunch.  
Spot of Shopping. Back to camp for tea.  
Many Huns Over.  
Very moonlight till 2200 hrs.*

**Friday 18th September**

*Office work in morning.  
To NZ Field Cashier (Lt Whitehead) at El Hamman after lunch.  
Called at 5 GRU. Saw Lt McKinnon & Capt. Lange.  
First taste of Zibib.<sup>270</sup> Very sweet drink, flavoured with Aniseed.  
Mildly Alcoholic.*

---

*Bright moonlight. Beaufighters busy.*

**Saturday 19th September**

*To Alexandria re. Photos & Books & Luger Pistol Parts.  
Office work in evening.*

**Sunday 20th September**

*Camp All Day.  
Interior Economy.*

**Monday 21st September**

*Visited by AD & DAD, GRE,  
Col. Hoffman<sup>271</sup> & Major Peek.  
Long discussion re. work of Unit & suggested changes in Establishments,  
etc.*

**Tuesday 22nd September**

*In camp all day.  
Considerable Air Activity after midnight.*

[UWD] *Lts Overton & Roydhouse to Landing Grounds south of Burg el Arab. Major McCleary & Lt A. Pryde, 21 NZ Bn, called re. certain graves in Ruweisat Area.*

### **Wednesday 23rd September**

*Hoffman & Peek called again.*

*Arranged to send Roydhouse to attach to 5 GRU (Lange).*

### **Thursday 24th September**

*Camp all day — office work. Preparing Accident Report on Accident in Delta when Baverstock knocked down small boy.*

*(Some injuries sustained)*

*Full moon.*

*Fine clear night — no air activity till after midnight.*

### **Friday 25th September**

*Office work.*

*To Alex to draw Pay & Shopping Activities.*

*Tea at Hostel with Mrs & Doug Spence.<sup>272</sup>*

[UWD] *Lt Roydhouse & 2 ORs shifted to 52 Kilo Post, North of Burg el Arab. To work with No 5 Graves Unit (English) till Southern Sector ready for our work. Capt. von Schramm to Hadra Cemetery with Unit Photographer. To NZ Advanced Base Pay Office, Mustapha Barracks. Lt Overton returned from Maadi Camp after receiving medical attention at Helwan Hospital.*

### **Saturday 26th September**

*Office work all day.*

*Considerable Air Activity overhead. Shell fragments fall in camp.*

---

<sup>270</sup> Similar to raki or arak and quite strong. Presumably Wally's was watered down

<sup>271</sup> Lieutenant Colonel R. Hoffman, UDF. Hoffman had replaced Hart as Assistant Director in August

<sup>272</sup> Reverend Douglas Spence of the NZ 20th Battalion. Spence had been wounded towards the end of the fighting on Ruweisat Ridge. He was later awarded the MC

**Sunday 27th September**

*Recreational Training & Interior Economy.*

**Monday 28th September**

*Very Heavy Dust Storm.*

*No Field Work.*

**Tuesday 29th September**

*Office Work All Day.*

**Wednesday 30th September**

*Down to Southern Sector.*

*Had "Grandstand" view of 44 Div. (British) attacking & taking 8 Strongpoints around Deir el Munassib.<sup>273</sup>*

*Some difficulty in getting to numbers of graves owing to minefields. Finally Risked It.*



**Figure 61**

Destroyed General Grant tank (photo: unknown Australian Sergeant)





**Figure 62**

"Tank grave" (in Libya, not Egypt) (photo: Oliver Conoley)

*Registered many "Tank" Graves in Wadi of Manquar el Taiyara [Manaqir el Taiyara]. Scores of M3 (General Grants) blown to small pieces (Figures 61 and 62).*

*Was a Terrible Battle & cost us Dearly.<sup>274</sup>*

<sup>273</sup> Operation Braganza

<sup>274</sup> The battle of Alam Halfa. The engagement at Manaqir el Taiyara is described in the war diaries of the 4th County of London Yeomanry for the 31st of August 1942.

"At 0130 hrs received Codeword 'PEPSODENT' by telephone. Regt moved after 15 minutes along previously marked centre line and were in position on high ground MANAQIR TAIYARA 899268 by 0230hrs.

"At 0800 Lt Col Scott took over command from Lt Col Harding-Newman, who returned to 22 Armd Bde HQ.

Enemy reported through the minefield near HIMEIMAT at 0800hrs and engaged by 4 Lt Armd Bde and 7 Motor Bde. Headed by 15th Panzer, enemy pressed due East, forcing our Bde back towards GABALLA. About 1400hrs column of MET and 50 tanks reported moving NE along telephone line towards MANAQIR TAIYARA. Order of battle 4 CLY centre, 1st/6th RTR right, 5th/2nd RTR left,

## OCTOBER

### Thursday 1st October

*Office work all day.*

[UWD] 2 ORs supervising burials & erection of crosses at Hadra War Cemetery (Extension), Alexandria. Lt Roydhouse & 2 ORs working in El Hamman Area with No 5 (British) GRU. Lt Overton to Wadi al Natrun Area to locate and register graves at various Landing Grounds. Captain von Schramm compiling reports and preparing sketch plans of graves in El Halfa Area.

### Friday 2nd October

*Office work in morning.*

*Truck away for rations.*

*To Alex. — Drew Pay. Collected snaps from Spiros Grivas.<sup>275</sup> Tea at Hotel with Ken Thornton — Home at 2030 hrs.*

Greys in reserve. Our Gunners (1st RHA) engaged enemy from 1200hrs onwards. B Sqn 4 CLY Cruisers acting as a patrol to South and SW, gradually drew back towards midday - one tank and 4 personnel casualties. At 1700hrs enemy tanks came into range and were engaged by all three regiments, the largest numbers of tanks appeared to be opposite 4 CLY - many Mark III and Mark IV Specials observed. In a fierce fire fight, which went on without relaxing until darkness, A Sqn (Major Cameron) took the brunt, losing all 12 Grants at one moment, but 2 eventually returned to the battle. Personnel casualties A Sqn 7 killed, 15 wounded. Greys came in to take up the A Sqn position. B Sqn 4 CLY not much engaged, D Sqn 3 CLY had excellent shooting and claimed 8 tanks certainly destroyed and 3 damaged, with no losses to themselves.

"AI Echelon Stuka'd during the afternoon - one killed and six wounded, including Major Rosekilly and Major Aldridge.

"Leaguered in line on the high ground. Heavy bombing by the RAF with help of flares to the South of our position all night. Some AP and small arms fire in the early morning directed from an enemy leaguer against the 5th/2nd RTR on our left - one ambulance burnt out" (4 County of London Yeomanry, 1942)

In the Unit War Diary for this day, Wally attributes the wrecking of the knocked out tanks to their subsequent demolition

<sup>275</sup> Spiros N. Grivas' Central Stationary and Bookstores on Alexandria's Sharia Saad Zaghloul

**Saturday 3rd October***Office work all day.**Heavy rain at 1000 hrs.***Sunday 4th October***To SAAF Cemetery, Kilo 151, Cairo–Alex. Desert Road.<sup>276</sup> Laid out large & necessary extension. GRU'd graves therein.**WINTER IS HERE!**Heavy rain at 2100 hrs.**Terrific gale blowing all night.***Monday 5th October***Office work all day.**More rain during day.***Tuesday 6th October***Down to El Halfa & El Mreir<sup>277</sup> Areas in Southern Sector.**Through NZ "Box" to within 1 mile of Hun Lines.**Some shelling by enemy of "Heliopolis Gate" into Box.**Returned to Camp at night.**Long day — very tired.**[UWD] Overton preparing Balance Sheet – Reg.**[regimental] funds a/c. Capt. von Schramm to El Halfa & El Mreir Areas. Registered graves & erected crosses at Point 102, NZ MDS cemetery, and NZ ADS Cemetery (in NZ Box). Located small Greek War Cemetery South East of Heliopolis Gate into NZ Box. Registered graves & erected crosses therein. Heavy rain during day.***Wednesday 7th October***Office work all day.**More Rain.*

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<sup>276</sup> Alam el Mireibet (Today Alam al Muraybit)

<sup>277</sup> Southwest of Ruweisat Ridge. Spelt El Mireir on allied maps

*Very Cold.*

*Gale Force Wind from N.*

*Hun planes & RAF fighting over camp about 1500 hrs. 1 bomb dropped by camp.*

### **Thursday 8th October**

NB.

*NZ MUTTON issued today with Rations.*

---

*Much Rain, Thunder & Lightning.*

*To El Halfa & El Mreir Areas & forward into Alam Nyalil [Alam Nayil] Box.*

*Good Stuka Dive-Bomb Show.*

*Heavy day's work.*

*Many graves.*

### **Friday 9th October**

*Alex. to draw Pay at Mustapha Barracks.*

*To Hadra Cemetery.*

*Shopping & to YM [YMCA] Hostel.*

### **Saturday 10th October**

*Office work.*

*Overhaul of trucks.*

### **Sunday 11th October**

*Office Work.*

*Interior Economy & Recreation (Maori PT).*

### **Monday 12th October**

*To El Halfa & Mreir Areas.*

*Erected & photo'd inscribed crosses in Point 102 & ADS Cemeteries.*

*Crosses in Greek Mil. [Military] Cemetery by Heliopolis Gate.*

### **Tuesday 13th October**

*Harry & Self doing reports (W3372) & Plans.*

**Wednesday 14th October**

*To new Concentration Cemetery, Amiriya (5500 Graves).<sup>278</sup>  
Rations & Petrol.*

**Thursday 15th October**

*El Mreir Area.  
(Isolated graves).*

**Friday 16th October**

*Alexandria — to Pay office.  
Shopping & Hostel.  
Hadra Cemetery. Collected Pegs from CRE.  
Terrific dust & Sand storm from 1600 hrs.  
Torrential Rains.  
40 foot palm blown over.*

**Saturday 17th October**

*Storm still going full blast. (Worst storm yet).  
No Work. Tent sanded under.*

**Sunday 18th October**

*Preparing plans for enlarging of Alam el Mireibet Cemetery.  
Storm passing.  
Heavy rains.*

**Monday 19th October**

*Whole Unit to Kilo 151 to lay out A. el M. cemetery.  
Lot of Heavy Rain.*

**Tuesday 20th October**

*To HQ 86 Sub-Area re. moving of Unit to Kilo 52.<sup>279</sup>*

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<sup>278</sup> The Unit War Diary mentions Amiriya Concentration cemetery repeatedly. This proved not to be a permanent establishment.

Till he started typing the Unit War Diary, Wally always spelled Amiriya, "Amriya". In the typed War Diary, both spellings are used

<sup>279</sup> El Hamman area

To AAG & Staff Capt. "A", 8th Army Rear HQ, re. transport.  
Lunch with Bill McLure [McClure] — Post Office.

### **Wednesday 21st October**

No 2 truck to AIF [Australian Imperial Force] OFP [Ordinance Field Park].

Written off as "Ditched".

To 8th Army & 3 OFP to draw new vehicle?

Slight Hitch.

Back to Camp.

Tremendous Air Activity.

Endless streams of Tanks, Guns, Troops, etc. moving forward.

### **Thursday 22nd October**

Harry Overton drew new(?) truck.

30 cwt Chevrolet. Excellent Order. 6 cylinder job 16 x 10.50 tyres.

Desert Worthy.

Self in Camp all day.

Tried Chev. out on sand — OK.

### **Friday 23rd October**<sup>280</sup>

To Alex. Drew Pay.

Shopping & Bath at YM [YMCA] Hostel.

Home.

More & more Planes over. Never such activity.

15 Warships leaving Alex. at 1650 hrs to proceed along coast to bombard Axis. Greatest Barrage in history of this war commenced at 2145 hrs & continued all night. 8th Army moved to attack at 2200 hrs. Full Moon & very light. Kiwis in northern Sector just south of AIF. Then UDF — 51 Div. (HD) [Highland Division]. Advance according to plan. Objectives All taken and Held. (How Jerry hates night fighting — How our lads love it).

### **Saturday 24th October**

Large convoys of POW[s] pass on way to el MEX<sup>281</sup> cages.

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<sup>280</sup> Start of the Second Battle of El Alamein



**Figure 63**

German POWs at a Water Point (photo: soldier Weymouth, NZ 18th Battalion)

*RAF, RAAF, SAAF & USAAF continue raids all day. All bombers having escorts of equal numbers of Fighter Bombers.*

*[Naive sketch of four engine bomber and a fighter.]*

*Artillery continues again from 2200 hrs. Navy just off coast, N of camp at El Mreir.*

*Those Naval Broadships (15"). Concussion something beyond description. I'd hate to be a Hun.*

*Where are the Hun Planes?*

*Army attack continues.*

*Terrific thunder storm & rain. Most impressive lightning storm ever seen.*

*Took Photographs (?)*

### **Sunday 25th October**

*To Alam el Mireibet Cemetery at Kilo 151.*

---

<sup>281</sup> On the outskirts of Alexandria (Figure 58)

*Unprecedented Air Activity (Ours). No Hun planes.  
Bombardment recommenced at 2300 hrs tonight — late.  
Bad headache — restless night.  
Several hundred POW[s] pass in trucks, en route to El Mex POW Cages.  
Ambulances moving to Front — ATS drivers. Ambulances moving back to  
Delta, very slowly — all afternoon & all night.*

### **Monday 26th October**

*Camp all day — Boys for rations.  
Air Activity from daylight till very late at night.  
Nearest Air Raids yet.  
USA Planes well into it.*

*[UWD] I truck to draw Rations, Water, P.ol [petrol],  
etc. Lt Overton to vicinity Bahig Rly Stn and to Hadra Mil.  
Cemeteries in search of grave of Gnr Hamblin, 2NZEF.  
Much increased AA fire from Bahig & Burg el Arab Areas.  
Capt. von Schramm retouching damaged inscriptions on  
Inscribed Crosses for NZ ADS, NZ MDS & Mirbat Aza  
Cemeteries. Lt Roydhouse to AIF Ordinance W/Shops,  
Hadra, Alex., to have new spring leaves made for & fitted  
to 15 cwt truck. Lt Overton to area W of Wadi el Natrun.*

### **Tuesday 27th October**

*Down to Manaquir el Taiyara [sic] in El Halfa Area.  
Remains of Squadron of General Grants — sorry sight.  
Long & weary day (400 miles).*

### **Wednesday 28th October**

*Office work all day.*

*[UWD] Captain von Schramm, office work. Major Peek,  
DAD, called. Lt Overton to crashed planes on sea coast,  
north of El Deir & to Kilo 151, Alam el Mireibet Cemetery,  
to layout plot for USA Air Force (Figure 74). To Abd Kadir  
village to register Indian Army graves.*



### **Thursday 29th October**

*Office work all day.*

### **Friday 30th October**

*To Alex. to draw Pay.*

*Hadra Cemetery.*

*Bath at YMCA Hostel.*

### **Saturday 31st October**

*Office work & weekly & monthly returns to AAG, 2 Echelon.*

*Writing late tonight.*

*Letter from Eva — record time of 1 month by sea.*

*By Air most of way (?)*

[UWD] *Lt Overton to Rosetta to select site for cemetery.*  
*Capt. von Schramm office work and Weekly Returns.*

### **Cairo Again**

## **NOVEMBER**

### **Sunday 1st November**

*Left for Cairo 0940.*

*Arrived NZ CPO 1340. 4 hrs — Good going.*

*Booked bed at NZ Club. To AD's office. To Club for tea.*

*Went to Onnig Tchakedjian's Flat — Out at cinema — Returned at 2100 hrs. Saw Colette. Face & hands almost better. Grand Reunion with Onnig & wife. Supper at 2300 hrs. Very nice Vermouth.*

*Club at 2330 hrs.*

*Good Sleep.*

[From this point on, the Unit War Diary is typed.]  
 Capt. von Schramm to Cairo, to HQ, Graves  
 Registration, GHQ, O2E [Second Echelon], MEF. Left  
 camp at 1000 hours; arrived Cairo, 1500 hours. To  
 NZ CPO and then to Office of AD, GRE, GHQ, MEF.  
 Lt Overton: Interior Economy and Maintenance of

vehicles. Then to DCRE [Deputy Commander Royal Engineers?], Amiriya, re. the new Amiriya cemetery. Called at cemetery. Arranged for a minimum of 6 allied and 3 graves in all other plots to be kept ready at all times. Major G. Peek, DAD, GRE called. Lt Roydhouse with No 5 GRU.

### **Monday 2nd November**

*To Heliopolis to AD, GRE,  
GHQ, O2E.*

*Cairo for lunch — Shopping.*

*Bath & changed & to call on Madame & Monsieur Onnig Tchak.  
[Tchakedjian]*

*Dined with them.*

*Mme, M, Armand & Colette & Odette Papazian.*

*M & Mme Papazian after dinner & also M Dick Papazian.*

*Most jolly evening.*

*Dined & Wined very well.*

### **Tuesday 3rd November**

*To Maadi — to Casualties Branch, 2 Echelon, 2NZEF.*

*To DADOS & drew clothing for ORs.*

*Lunch with Lt Col. Alexander.*

*Tea at club & then to M Onnig's shop. Madam & Colette there.*

*Gifts for Eva.*

*To meet M & Me [Mme] Morriss Cohen. Dined with them at the  
Chrystal Restaurant.*

### ***The stink of death***

In conversation with his friend Dal McGuirk, Wally remarked that he never took souvenirs from the bodies he exhumed—the smell was so strong, so overwhelming. Even if an object was washed, he said, the smell would linger in the mind.<sup>282</sup>

To understand this aspect of Wally experience, it is necessary to understand what exactly the unit was tasked with processing.

A dead body goes through several stages of decomposition —“fresh”, when the perceived smell is primarily that of the broken or burnt body;<sup>283</sup> “bloat”, when the putrefying body swells-up, and there is a strong sulphur, methane and ammonia-like smell; “active”, when it deflates, and the smell—still strong—becomes more complex (in a hot climate, this can be smelt downwind 90 metres away);<sup>284</sup> “advanced”, when much of the body has decomposed and the smell begins to diminish; and “dry” or “skeletal”, when only hair, cartilage and bone remain, but the surrounding soil and—it would appear—any surviving clothing continue to smell of decomposition.<sup>285</sup> The rate at which these stages advance depends on the size of the body and the environment in which it is located—whether it is buried or not and how deeply; the temperature; the humidity; and the abundance and diversity of insects and microbes. For an unburied or only shallowly buried human being in the desert, the first of these could have been over within weeks, and the last within months. For much of the time, therefore, Wally will have been dealing with later stages of decomposition. Indeed, it is surely significant, notwithstanding the aforementioned remark to Mr McGuirk, that in his diaries Wally only mentions the smell of death twice, in one case almost certainly hyperbolically.<sup>286</sup> What was hard on the unit, was not so much the disgust, but the *numbers* of dead, the environment in which they were located, and the workload and discomfort this entailed.

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<sup>282</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>283</sup> e.g. Craig, 1982, p. 65; Douglas, 1946 [1966], p. 66

<sup>284</sup> Measurements taken by me on dead horses during the UCL Institute of Archaeology Rapa Nui Landscapes of Construction Project

<sup>285</sup> Verheggen et. al. 2017, tab. I

<sup>286</sup> See note 312

The other senses are notably absent from Wally’s narrative(s). There is nothing of touch—cf. Keith Douglas’s poignant, “and mocked at by his own equipment/ that’s hard and good when he’s decayed”—or of hearing, such as the buzzing of mosquitoes in the delta, the growling and clattering and scratching of tanks, the absence of sound in the desert (when it was indeed silent)

Around this time, Wally probably picked up the faded Luftwaffe eagle shown in **Figure 7**, which he said he found in Egypt after El Alamein.<sup>287</sup> What a continental eagle was doing there at this date is unknown.

For the unit, this was a period of more, and more, of the same. The danger of air attack was almost over; but the danger from mines had increased. Day after day, out the different sections went—Wally to Mirbat Aza, Overton to Mashruka (SW of Alexandria), Roydhouse to Alam Nayil, and so on. The flies were impossible. The record endless. The highlights were Christmas, New Year and the New Year marriage in Alexandria of Private Tom Baverstock, one of the original members of the unit, to a local woman, Miss Khanum Haik. But these events aside, the work of location, exhumation, and registration went on and on and on...

### **Wednesday 4th November**

*To Heliopolis — loaded temporary crosses.*

*Called at NZ CPO.*

*Left 1400 hrs.*

*Called Alam el Mireibet Cemetery & registered graves.*

*On to Camp. 1745.*

*Very fast trip (200 miles).*

### **Thursday 5th November**

*Camp all day catching up on work.*

*Great news of our advance past Fuka & westwards.*

*Quiet night.*

*Whole Army moving West.*

### **Friday 6th November**

*Large reinforcements of all kinds moving west along coast road (**Figure 64**). Much USA stuff.*

*To Mustapha [Barracks] for Pay.*

*Hadra Cemetery.*

*To YMCA Hostel — Bath.*

*Returned to camp.*

*Fighter Pilot (DYER) crashed behind my tent.<sup>287</sup> Ghastly accident. Plane completely smashed & burnt & pilot thrown out but burning. Rushed to help but all clothing burnt off bar 1 sock & 1 glove. Died in a few minutes. Body to Hadra Cemetery, Alex.*

*Great advance of 8th Army. Roads choked with traffic following retreating Huns.*

*Wish we had some beer to Celebrate.*



**Figure 64**

Traffic jam at Sollum during the allied advance (photo: Lloyd Rogers)

### **Saturday 7th November**

*Camp all day.*

*Traffic on road increasing hourly. Much USA stuff passing.*

*Hard to realise we have so much equipment & so many troops in whole*

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<sup>287</sup> D. McGuirk pers. comm.

<sup>288</sup> Lt Basil Dyer, aged 21, of 1st Squadron SAAF. Lieutenant Dyer was flying a Hurricane II (BP110)

*of ME let alone in the WD.*

*Huge endless convoys of Air Force & AA Units passing camp.*

*Enemy Air Activity a thing of the past.*

*Road traffic continues all night with brilliant headlights.*

*Amazing.*

*Like Queen St AK [Auckland] on Friday Night. (Pre-War of course).*

### **Sunday 8th November**

*Shifted Unit to new camp site — 400 yds north of Kilo 92<sup>289</sup> Alex.—Daba Coast Road. A bit dusty & the flies. Large & very, very smelly cemetery about 500 yds up the wind. Don't mind the smell — but the flies.*

*Nuff Sed.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm and 5 ORs moved camp to new location in vicinity of Kilo 52 [92], near El Alamein at MR 43359019. Established camp at this MR. Pte Baverstock suffering from injured shoulder so detailed to go to Hadra Cemetery at Alexandria and replace Pte McLeary who rejoined unit. Lt Overton in Cairo at Office of AD, GRE, MEF.

### **Monday 9th November**

*Camp all day.*

*Took a stroll round old Aussie camp sites after lunch & was very lucky — Found lots of fly-netting. Screened entrance to tent & then Blitzed the thousands of flies inside — what a haul.*

*Lone Hun plane over at 2000 hrs. 1st seen or heard for two weeks.*

—  
*Huns out of Egypt again.*

### **Tuesday 10th November**

*Camp all day — Office Work.*

*Those Flies — !!! Can't write what I think about them.*

*Hot days now, but very bitterly cold at night.*

*Three blankets on top, but will have to get into the old Flea-bag soon.*

*Paying all bits & pieces of 2 NZ Div.*

[UWD] Lt Overton left Cairo for Base Camp. Arrived back at Unit at 2000 hrs. Involved in minor collision with another Army truck during darkness. Some damage to both vehicles. Lt Roydhouse working south of El Alamein all day. Capt. von Schramm and Unit Draftsman [sic] engaged compiling indexed lists of burials in NZ GRU Area. Two ORs stationed at Hadra Cemetery, Extension, Alexandria. 1 truck for rations.

### **Wednesday 11th November**

*Flies & more Flies & then more.*

*Camp all day.*

*More men to get paid.*

*4 Fd Regt, 21 Mechanical Equip Coy, 1 Survey Troop, & Others.*

*Everyone exceedingly happy at news of progress of 8th Army.*

*How to get mail — that is the question — How? We are now almost isolated as Army is on Frontier & in Libya — Oh Well!*

*Maleesh!<sup>290</sup>*

*I want letters though.*

### **Thursday 12th November**

*Another day in camp — with those Flies.*

*Office work all day.*

*Rather fascinated by streams of large surf boats passing along road to West — what for and where to?*

*(Answer) [written with different pen] Tobruch Harbour so blocked with bombed & sunken ships as to be unnavigable by large ships which have to remain outside & all cargo lightered into port.*

### **Friday 13th November**

*Camp all day — office work.*

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<sup>289</sup> Kilo 92 on the desert railway line, near El Imayid Station

<sup>290</sup> Maleesh = never mind

### **Saturday 14th November**

*Office work all day.*

*Conference with Lt Col. Hoffman, AD, GRE, re. burial of many dead in central sector.*

*All other units to participate in this work.*

### **Sunday 15th November**

*Unit moved for Southern Sector.*

*Chev. truck bogged in Deir el Munassib. Stuck for some time.*

*Contacted No 2 Motor Ambulance en route.*

*Selected site near Stuka Dump, at Deir el Muhafid. MR 89122647 (Figure 58).*

*Dug in all tents.*

### **Monday 16th November**

*Truck to draw rations.*

*Collected much mail from NZ 4th Fd Ambulance.*

*Carried out recce of locality.*

*Some rain at night.*

### **Tuesday 17th November**

*To el Himeimat — registered many graves.*

*Fighting French troops<sup>291</sup> moved into our Area.*

*Darned nuisance — very dirty & unhygienic people.*

*Lt General Hughes<sup>292</sup> (44 Div.) called twice.*

### **Wednesday 18th November**

*To HQ, 44th Div.*

*Called on General Hughes.*

*Registered many graves in Mirbat Aza Area.*

*[UWD] Lt Overton still away at Mashruka. Capt. von Schramm to HQ, 44 Division, to see General Hughes, Div. Commander, re. the registration of 44 Div. graves. Then to Mirbat Aza Area and registered many graves, the majority enemy dead. Located several*



small cemeteries. Returned to camp and attended to office work — Graves Registration Reports and plans of locations of graves. Light rain during the day. Nights here are far warmer than when Unit was camped out on the coast. Large convoys of captured enemy vehicles being driven back from Himeimat Area, loaded with salvage of all kinds.

### **Thursday 19th November**

*Office Work all day.*

### **Friday 20th November**

*Office work till 1300 hrs.*

*Left for Alexandria at 1300 hrs.*

*Front right spring assembly collapsed. Slow trip to Alex. 7½ hrs.*

*Booked in at YMCA Hostel.*

*Hot Shower & good bed & meal.*

*Heavy Rain & Heavy Dust Storm.*

### **Saturday 21st Nov 42 November**

*To Hadra W/Shops re. repairs to trucks.*

*Shopping in Alexandria.*

### **Sunday 22nd November**

*To HQ, 18 Army Troops Coy,<sup>293</sup> re. mail. Collected good mail.*

*To DADOS, Mustapha [Barracks] — 16 Area.*

### **Monday 23rd November**

*To Hadra cemetery & then left for Muhafid via El Imayid.*

*3½ hrs return trip.*

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<sup>291</sup> The Unit War Dairy has the French troops arriving over two days, the 16th and 17th. Wally called them the 1st FFC Brigade, presumably the *1e Brigade Française Libre*

<sup>292</sup> Ivor Hughes

<sup>293</sup> New Zealand Engineers

[UWD] Lt Overton working in Area near Deir el Muhafid — Graves Registration. Captain von Schramm to Hadra Cemetery to see Detachment working there. Explained to Pte Baverstock the requirements for his marriage to a non-forces girl. Left Alexandria at 1100 hours for HQ, NZ GRU. Called at 6 BOD to collect stores approved by DADOS, 16 Area. Camp at 1600 hours.

**Tuesday 24th November**

*Office Work all day.*

[UWD] Lt Overton, Field work all day. Capt. von Schramm, Office work — compiling reports and working on sketch plans of cemeteries.

**Wednesday 25th November**

*Office Work All day.*

[UWD] Lt Overton left for Mashruka Area. One truck to Alamein to draw rations. Capt. von Schramm, Office work all day.

**Thursday 26th Nov 42 November**

*Office Work All day.*

**Friday 27th November**

*Office Work All day.*

[UWD] Lt Overton compiling reports all day. Capt. von Schramm to Mirbat Aza British Military Cemetery to erect Inscribed crosses and register graves.

**Saturday 28th November**

*In camp all day.*

**Sunday 29th November**

*To Point 106 [102], NZ MDS<sup>294</sup> Cemetery, to erect Inscribed crosses & Registration work nearby.*



**Figure 65**  
NZ MDS cemetery at Point I02 ("I06") (photo: Walter von Schramm)

### **Monday 30th November**

*Out in Field all Day.*

## **DECEMBER**

### **Tuesday 1st December**

*Field work near Himeimat all day.*

### **Wednesday 2nd December**

*In Camp — Office Work all day.*

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<sup>294</sup> Point I06 was located at approximately 8500 2760 (purple grid), on the axis side of the El Alamein line. The NZ MDS cemetery was located at Point I02 (see note 261). This confusion between Points I02 and I06 occurs in both the caption's to Wally's photographs and on a Graves Concentration Report Form on graves from Point I02 (which it places at Point I06 but calls the NZ MDS and gives the correct grid reference for Point I02)

**Thursday 3rd December**

*Office work all day.*

**Friday 4th December**

*Working in Munassib Area All Day.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm, Field work all day. Lt Roydhouse in camp all day. Lt Overton returned from Cairo at 1700 hours after very long trip owing to heavy sand on Barrel track, south of Himeimat.

**Saturday 5th December**

*Office work all day.*

**Sunday 6th December**

*Working in office all day.*

**Monday 7th December**

*Office work all day.*

*Subalterns bringing such a volume of work that I am kept going full time doing registration returns.*

[UWD] Lt Overton, Field Work all day. Lt Roydhouse, plotting grave locations on to maps and other office work. Capt. von Schramm, office work all day. One truck to El Alamein for rations: water, mail, etc. Major Peek, DAD, GRE, arrived on tour of inspection accompanied by OC American Graves Registration Unit. Inspecting party left again after three hours stay.

**Tuesday 8th December**

*To Deir el Ragil Area.*

*Registration work — All Huns.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm to Deir el Ragil locality on Registration work. Lt Overton to vicinity Stuka

Beacon and North Bedford Gate to work. Lt  
 Roydhouse to Alam Nyal Box to register graves in NZ  
 Bde Cemetery. All officers compiling reports during  
 evening.

### **Wednesday 9th December**

*Office Work. All day.*

### **Thursday 10th December**

*Left for Cairo. Long trip via El Alamein. Arrived Cairo at dusk. Booked  
 bed at NZ Forces Club. (In Passageway).  
 Called at shop to see Onnig Tchakedjian.  
 Bed early.*

### **Friday 11th December**

*To Heliopolis to GHQ, GRE.  
 Saw Col. Hoffman.  
 To Town — lunch at Club.  
 Shopping. To Onnig's home.  
 Dinner-out — with Onnig & Angele T [Tchakedjian]  
 To Metro Theatre & saw "Woman of the Year".<sup>295</sup> Darned Funny. (9.30  
 pm Session).  
 Home I am.*

### **Saturday 12th December**

*To DADOS, 2NZEF, & to 2 Echelon. Saw Lt Wallace & Sgt Carroll & Lt  
 Col. Alexander (AAG).  
 Lunched at Maadi.  
 To Onnig's shop.  
 Dinner at NZ Club.  
 Called at Morriss' shop.  
 Supper & wine with Morriss & Mrs M.  
 Home early.*

---

<sup>295</sup> 1942 romantic comedy directed by George Stevens starring Katherine Hepburn  
 and Spencer Tracy

**Sunday 13th December**

*Left for Alexandria.*

*Arrived NZ YMCA Hostel 1630 hrs. Booked for night.*

*Saw Pte Tom Baverstock & his prospective bride & arranged all Application forms.*

**Monday 14th December**

*Called map office, Amiriya, & then back to Camp. Arrived at Muhafid at 1600 hrs.*

*[UWD] Capt. von Schramm office work all day.<sup>296</sup>*

*Lt Overton carrying out exhumations in Ragil Area. Lt Roydhouse to Alam Nayil Area.*

**Tuesday 15th December**

*To Deir el Munassib Area.*

*Registration Work.*

**Wednesday 16th December**

*Office Work all Day.*

**Thursday 17th December**

*To Munassib Area.*

**Friday 18th December**

*Down to el Himeimat & El Taqa Plateau.<sup>297</sup> Visited old Ital. & French positions.*

*Found lots of graves & mines.*

*Collected Fleas by thousand.*

**Saturday 19th December**

*Office Work all day.*

**Sunday 20th December**

*Camp all day.*

*Odd jobs & office work.*

*Out collected several hundreds of empty bottles.*

**Monday 21st December**

*Working on Registrations around Deir el Muhafid, near Camp.*

**Tuesday 22nd December**

*FULL ☿ MOON*

*Office Work All Day.*

*Very down in Dumps.*

*Out to look at "Our" Moon after dark. Thoughts of my Beloved, far away. I know how she too has watched this same moon.*

**Wednesday 23rd December**

*Office Work All Day.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm, office work all day. Truck that went for rations did not return till 1600 hours today. Front spring leaves broken on outward trip. To Hadra W/Shops, Alexandria, for repairs. Another spring broken on return trip. Replaced spring at camp and left at 2000 hours for Amiriya to be in time for rations on 24-12-42. Lt Roydhouse left for Hadra Cemetery, Alexandria. Called at Mustapha Barracks for disinfectant and paint. Lt Overton to Deir el Ragil Area.

**Thursday 24th December**

*Xmas Eve.*

*Working in office All Day.*

*Great Fun after dark. Smoke screens, Hun & Ital. Flares.*

*My tent & [a?] truck on fire.*

*Harry & Garth & [men?] off to Point 106.*

*Dragged RAF lads out of bed. Drinking Party & How!*

*Home at 0500 hrs. (Xmas Day).*

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<sup>296</sup> In the Unit War Diary, Wally conflates the previous two days in Alexandria

<sup>297</sup> c. 15 km west of Qaret el Himeimat (Figure 58)

### **Friday 25th December**

*No one up till 1000 hrs. A fair number of sore heads after last night. APC & Aspros into action.*

*Dinner at 1300 hrs.*

*Toheroa Soup<sup>298</sup>*

*Roast Pork & Roast Chicken*

*Plumb Pudding*

*Fruit Salad & Cream*

*Nuts*

*Fruit*

*Canadian Beer (White Horse)*

*Wine — whiskey — Gin.*

*RAF Lads along in afternoon. Football — Shooting & Fireworks. High Tea. RAF Boys home after dark.*

*A Grand Day — But — I want — I miss my Curley top.*

### **Saturday 26th December**

*Work again — office all day.*

—

*Very Cold night.*

### **Sunday 27th December**

*Office Work all day.*

*Boys away for rations.*

### **Monday 28th December**

*Office work all day.*

*Correspondence answering many enquiries re. graves. Some from NZ.*

*Capt. von Schramm, to Munassib Area. Lt Overton to Qattara Depression Area. Lt Roydhouse to Alam Nayil Area.*

---

<sup>298</sup> A popular New Zealand canned soup. The Toheroa is a large clam. Harvesting it was banned long-ago due to its over exploitation



**Tuesday 29th December**

*Office Work all day.*

**Wednesday 30th December**

*In Field all day — To El Himeimat Area.*

*Worked near January Minefields.*

*Working among scattered mines but did not know till leaving for Area —*

*Golly what a scare I had — & what luck.*

*They say “God looks after His Own”.*

—  
?

**Thursday 31st December**

*To El Alamein Station. To No 1 UDF GRU HQ.*

*Saw Lt Bleach & lunched with him. Thence to No 1 Section, 18 NZ Troops Coy, also at Alamein.*

*To Alamein Cemetery (Figure 13). Over 1650 bodies concentrated herein already & more daily. Thence South down Springbok Rd on Reconnaissance as far as Bab el Qattara.*

*Recce'd underground dugouts & fortifications & decided to move into them as soon as possible.*

*Made for home across country but caught by darkness while in large & badly marked minefield. Moved on very cautiously for two hours.*

*Dangerous, so decided to sleep in cab. However saw flares sent up from our camp & continued. Lost Blue Band track & entered field of loose mines. Heck! What a scare. Took “Blackout” masks off Headlamps but little avail.*

*Kept crawling on & at last came to gate in minefield — still lost.*

*Through gate & followed fence to Red gate — Saved at last. Know rest of track well so on to camp. Hurricane lamp hung on Camp Cross as beacon — Godsend. What a hectic end to 1942. Good hot feed[?] of Whitebait Patties & some wine (Cyprus).*

*Fireworks — Flares & Rockets & Bonfires.*

*Bed at 0313 hrs on 1-1-43,*

*The New Year.*

*I think this is the most hectic New Year's Eve I have ever spent. Don't wish another like it.*

*Wonder what my Lassie is doing?*

---

*I miss her more than ever*

*Enter 1943.*

*What does it Hold for us?*





**Figure 66**

Wally at the Qattara Depression (photo: unknown)

## DIARY 1943

By the winter of 1942/1943 the cracks were beginning to show in Wally's and the unit's morale. There were many reasons for this: a lack of leave, an increased work-load after the Second Battle of El Alamein, which had enabled access to areas of the desert that had previously been inaccessible, the weather, poor rations and mines—possibly made worse by a new, tougher Commanding Officer at GREMEF (Col. R. Hoffman). In Wally's case this was manifest in a number of official complaints and special requests made by him, a growing reflection, wholly uncharacteristic of his earlier diary entries, and—in places—a poor correspondence between the dates of events referred to in his personal and in the Unit War Diary, which indicates that one or other, but most likely the War Diary,<sup>299</sup> was not always kept up-to-date. The pace of life in the desert had changed.

The new year opened with the unit camped at Deir el Muhafid in the southern section of the former El Alamein line.

### JANUARY

#### Friday 1st January

*Reveille — 1000 hrs.*

*Many Sore Heads in Camp.*

*Office work all day till 1600 hrs. Then left for Alex. Dark by the time we reached Bir Gaballa. Slow trip. Arrived Hostel at 2000 hrs. Joined New Year's Dinner with NZ Navy Lads. Quiet evening. Bed 0100 hrs. Very tired.*

#### Saturday 2nd January

*To Mustapha Barracks at 0900 hrs. Drew £E 75.*

*Then to HQ, 18 Army Troops Coy, for mail. Thence to 10 DID [Detail Issue Depot], Amiriya, re. rations.*

*Alex. at 1600 hrs.*

*Shopping in Boulevard Zaghloul.*

*To Hostel — Read & to bed at 2400 hrs.*

[UWD] Lt Overton working in the vicinity of Point 106 Military Cemetery all day. Lt Roydhouse working in Deir el Munassib Area all day.

Capt. von Schramm, to Mustapha Barracks, 16 Area Paymaster to draw cash. Thence to 10 DID, Amiriya, re. drawing of rations. Drew 3-days rations and saw OC, DID, re. drawing of rations for one week at a time. From him, referred to "Q" Branch, 16 Area, for authority to draw 7-days rations with special tinned vegetables and extra fruit (tinned) in lieu of fresh vegetables, etc. Returned to Alexandria at 1600 hours.

### Sunday 3rd January

*To*

DAQMG [Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General] & DDMS [Deputy Director Medical Services] at HQ, 16 Area, Mustapha Barracks, re. Rations, Flysol,<sup>300</sup> Kerosene etc. Obtained Special Authorities for all. Mail from 18 NZ A Troops Coy & left for Camp. Home at 1500 hrs.

*Howling gale blowing all night — very dirty — and how — night.*

*Bed Early.*

*Dust pouring into tent.*

### Monday 4th January

*Gale continues without slackening all day & on into the night. Dust thicker than heavy fog. Everyone very miserable.*

*No work at all.*

[UWD] Dust storm continues unabated all night and all day. Wind veered to the West. Bitterly cold down here. Flies seem to be suppressed somewhat

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<sup>299</sup> See diary entry for the 1st of August 1942

<sup>300</sup> Also known as flit. Made from pyrethrum, an extract of the chrysanthemum flower, and kerosene. It was often in short supply and was ordered to be used sparingly (Crew, 1955, pp. 196–97; Montgomery, 1942, p. 8)

by the cold & the high winds. No work done today, either outside or inside, owing to the dirty conditions prevailing. Everyone becoming very "Browned Off" with the weather and the non-arrival of permission to allow leave for personnel of Unit after six months spell out from Base Camp without a break. Have made application to AD, GRE, GHQ, MEF [Hoffman], but he is not very sympathetic. Am afraid that he does not realise the conditions under which we are working in this sector at present. Col. Hoffman has visited all Units in Western Desert but has not paid a visit to NZ GRU. If he does not approve the granting of leave to personnel, I shall apply to DDM[S], 16 Area, for a recommendation that all ranks be granted leave for a minimum period of seven days forthwith. This has already been suggested by Medical Officer at El Alamein in view of the nature of our work and the monotony of rations now being supplied to us.

### **Tuesday 5th January**

*Storm slackened a little about 1300 hrs. Wind still very strong but dust not lifting. Tent so full of dust & so much on tent & fly that flapping in the wind is causing young dust storm in tent all the time. Feel very dirty & unshaven but can do nothing till dust settles. All hands the same. We sure look a lot of filthy tramps. Wind dropping at 1800 hrs. Tried to clean tent out but it comes in as quickly as it goes out. Bitterly cold — Settled a lot of flies. Thank the Lord for That Small Mercy.*

### **Wednesday 6th January**

*Camp all Day. Office Work. Lt Overton's truck wrecked by Ital. mines, south of camp while on KT2 track. Harry, Pidwell & Gasgoigne trekked 15 miles to camp, carrying heavy gear, etc. No personnel injured.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse to northern part of Deir el Munassib. Lt Overton to southern portion of Munassib

Area to vicinity of January Gates and thence working towards the north. While proceeding along VT [KT2?] Track, truck struck an Italian mine and was disabled. Investigations showed that what had been thought to be a perfectly safe track, was in reality part of a large Italian minefield. Truck left and after removing all valuable gear, Lt Overton and 2 ORs who were with him, set out on foot to return to camp where they arrived at 2100 hours after very tiring trek. Much anxiety felt for their safety owing to the fact of the trip being expected to last only a few hours. Have expected for some time, that one or another section would have trouble with unmarked mines ere long. It has happened.

#### **Thursday 7th January**

*Contacted REs [Royal Engineers] re. salvage of truck. To Alamein to see CRE [Commander Royal Engineers]. Obtained copies of tracings of minefields. To HQ, No 1 UDF GRU.*

#### **Friday 8th January**

*Overton & Roydhouse & all ranks to Chev. [Chevrolet] truck with 1 officer & 5 ORs, RE, & Detector apparatus.*

*Removed some mines but gave up as mines are new type & very dangerous. Most of Area near El Himeimat declared "Out of Bounds" to all bar REs engaged on mine clearance. Two Waugh Arab Legion soldiers reached our camp after trekking from 0400 hrs from about 10 Kilos south of Himeimat. Their truck destroyed & also food & water by mine. Signalled RAF HQ for relief of rest of Waugh troops at track — no food or water.*

#### **Saturday 9th January**

*Convoy from 77 Coy REs called at camp & collected guide & then left for Himeimat area. (5 trucks). Leading truck having 10 [Intelligence Officer] as OC Convoy struck mine & was wrecked & burnt. Driver wounded & Waugh guide badly burnt.*



[The Unit War Diary does not mention the destruction of the RE rescue truck.] Lt Roydhouse to Alam Nayil Area all day on registration duties. Lt Overton waited for Lt Aidee, RE, to bring party of Sappers to clear area around truck to facilitate salvage operations. However, Major Young, OC, 77 Coy, RE, arrived and informed us that owing to the nature of the mines in this area Col. Costello, CRE, Amiriya, will not allow any of the RE personnel to approach the area where truck lies till he has made a personal inspection of the mines thereabouts as they are a new type of Italian mine not hitherto encountered by his Unit, and furthermore, they are known to be so dangerous that the Italians have discontinued using this particular type of mine. Relief party for rescue of Egyptian Arab Legion soldiers stranded south of El Himeimat arrives at our camp. Interpreter questions the two Egyptian soldiers and obtains full information re. the accident to their vehicle. Proceeding to Lake El Maghra when a hidden mine was encountered in the middle of a "safe" track, [the] Truck [was] destroyed with all rations and water. RE Intelligence Officer set off with interpreter and party of Sappers and three [sic] trucks to rescue stranded solders. Lt Overton then went out to Alamein to see CRE re. possibilities of early attempt to salvage our vehicle. Capt. von Schramm in office all day. Very cold wind blowing from west. By far the coldest night so far experienced.

### **Sunday 10th January**

*To Alamein to meet DAD, GRE, Major Dixon.  
Back to camp at 1700 hrs.*

### **Monday 11th**

*Office Work all day.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse to Alam Nayil Area to conduct exhumations in several small cemeteries there. Lt Overton preparing Registration Reports and plans. Capt. von Schramm, preparing tracings of minefields to be overprinted on 1: 50,000 maps of our Areas. HQ truck left for Alexandria with mail and instructions for personnel stationed at Hadra Cemetery. To call at Naafi, Amiriya, for mess stores. To collect weekly rations tomorrow at Amiriya. A little warmer this evening, but still very cold. Strong winds all day (W).

### **Tuesday 12th January**

*Office Work all day.*

*DAD — Major Dixon arrived & stopped.*

### **Wednesday 13th January**

*To Munassib Area with Dixon & Roydhouse. Inspected area where bad strafing had taken place. Many bodies lying about unburied. Terrible Mess.*

*Conference in evening & decided to leave Area.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse to Munassib Area. Lt Overton and Capt. von Schramm to vicinity of January Minefields to show DAD where truck was blown up and still is. Inspection of various parts of battlefield around January Minefields. Afternoon: Lt Roydhouse and Capt. with DAD to locality in the Munassib Depression to show where approximately 80 British bodies were located, unburied, some time ago and where considerable work has been done in burying and erecting crosses. Large Area which has been subjected to a great deal of shelling and dive-bombing and many vehicles (British) have been completely destroyed. Bodies in very bad state. Unit officers and DAD had conference in evening as to advisability of continuing

work in the area at present being worked, owing to danger to personnel from mines. General policy of GRE Units discussed very fully.

#### **Thursday 14th January**

*Office Work all day.*

*Overton & 2 ORs left for Cairo. (Leave).*

#### **Friday 15th January**

*Office Work all day.*

#### **Saturday 16th January**

*Office Work all day.*

*"A". [?]*

#### **Sunday 17th January**

*To El Taqa Area to do Recce of new Area & Fortress "A".<sup>301</sup>*

[UWD] Interior Economy and Recreational Training.  
Capt. von Schramm & Lt Roydhouse to El Taqa Area  
to make reconnaissance of fresh ground to be worked  
over. Also recce'd Fortress "A" with view to moving  
camp to that area.

#### **Monday 18th January**

*To Alexandria.*

*To Area Cashier. (Closed).*

*Stopped at Hostel.*

#### **Tuesday 19th January**

*Truck to Amiriya to collect Rations. Self to Mustapha by taxi. Drew  
£E 175.*

*To Hadra W/Shops [workshops] to have repairs carried out to truck.  
Hostel at night.*

*Spent 3 hours with Secretary Springbok Club. (Sapper).*

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<sup>301</sup> The Qattara or Kaponga Box (Cody, 1955, p. 109). In the diaries, Wally spelled Taqa, "Taqa", "Taaqa" and "Taqaa"

**Wednesday 20th January**

*Left Alex. for Camp.*

*Arrived 1700 hrs.*

**Thursday 21st January**

*Office Work.*

**Friday 22nd January**

*Moved Unit to new location at "Fortress A".*

*MR 8695 2694.*

*Very Comfy — Below Ground.*

**Saturday 23rd January**<sup>302</sup>

*Did Recce around Fortress Area. Dugouts very dirty but few fleas. Some Bed Bugs though.*

*Hundreds of mice.*

*Very Tame.*

**Sunday 24th January**

*Office Work all day.*

*Much Dust & Wind.*

**Monday 25th January**

*Recce south of Fortress Area.*

*Dust Storm continues.*

**Tuesday 26th January**

*To Ital. cemetery on Pipeline Road, South of Fort.*<sup>303</sup>

**Wednesday 27th January**

*Office Work All day.*

[UWD] Lt Overton and two ORs to El Alamein to

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<sup>302</sup> Tripoli occupied by allied forces

<sup>303</sup> The "Pipeline" road ran diagonally from near the coast between Tell el Eisa and El Alamein Railway Stations and Munqar abu Dweis. Most of the locations referred to here lie immediately to the east of it (Figure 58)

take over control of the Military Cemetery there. Lt Roydhouse to Italian Cemetery south of Fortress "A", on Qattara Road. Capt. von Schramm, Office work all day. Heavy dust storm all day and night.

#### **Thursday 28th January**

*Office Work All day.*

*Storm still Continues.*

#### **Friday 29th January**

*To Ital. Cemetery at MR 8609 2587.*

*Exhumed many bodies.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm to Italian Cemetery on Pipeline road at MR 8609 2587. 131 graves, some British and some New Zealanders. Many exhumations carried out to try to establish identity of British and New Zealanders buried by enemy in this plot.

#### **Saturday 30th January**

*To Ital. Cemetery all Day.*

*Bad dust still.*

#### **Sunday 31st January**

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

*Did a huge wash & [ironed?] at night.*

### **FEBRUARY**

#### **Monday 1st February**

*Office work all day.*

*Did a 4 mile walk for constitutional in afternoon.*

*Truck to Alex.*

#### **Tuesday 2nd February**

*Office all morning. Exhumations near camp in afternoon.*

*Walked a couple of miles for exercise.*

**Wednesday 3rd February**

*Out on foot in morning.*

*Truck returned from Alex. late in afternoon — New engine installed.*

**Thursday 4th February**

*Self & Jack Crutch did recce to Abu Dweiss "Box". Down Pipeline Road — through box — South down Manqar Abu Dweiss [Munqar abu Dweis] (Pass) to edge of Qattara Depression (Figure 66). Then north up Qattara Rd & back to camp. 2 exhumations during trip.*

**Friday 5th February**

*To Diyura & did exhumations.*

**Saturday 6th February**

*To Qattaret el Diyura & exhumed Harry's B [Brother] in Law, T MAJ. BASSETT, B.I.,<sup>304</sup> & numbers of others.*

**Sunday 7th**

*In Camp all day. Straightened up affairs (?) ready for Leave.*

*Roydhouse returned from Leave.*

[The dates in Wally's personal diary and the Unit War Diary for the beginning of February do not correspond. The following is the War Diary's entry for the 7th:] Carried out several exhumations in El Diyura Area. Exhumed *once again* [my italics], the bodies of T Brig. Grey and T Maj. Bassett and many others. Some identified. Lt Roydhouse and Section returned from leave at 1530 hours. Lt Overton called re. El Alamein cemetery, etc.

**Monday 8th February**

*Camp all day. Office work. Ready to go on "Leave".*

*Leave in Cairo*

**Tuesday 9th February**

*Left Bab el Qattara 0800 hrs. Arrived El Alamein 0900 hrs & left again*

0930. Arrived NZ Chief Post Office 1430 hrs. Booked Kitchenette “Flat A” at NZ Club. To Maadi with Jack Crutch & Ern Pidwell.<sup>305</sup>

Met Bill after 3 years. Did we talk.

Back to Cairo with Ern & Jack & dined at “Chrystal” restaurant & Brasserie.

Bed early.

### Wednesday 10th February

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

To Heliopolis to report to AD, GRE. Back to town — Shopping. Called on my friend Onnig Tchakedjian. Great welcome from Onnig & all Staff at shop. To Maadi at 1730 to meet Bill — Took Bill, Jack & Ern & Vic Martin to La Taverne Française<sup>306</sup> for Reunion & Anniversary Dinner. Thence to “Harry’s Bar” — Enjoyed bottle of “Stella” and talked — & talked. Took boys to Maadi in truck.

Bed late.

### Thursday 11th February

Shopping at Onnig’s & around town. Writing letters.

Called on Morris & Maude Cohen.

Dinner at Club.

Early Bed.

### Friday 12th February

Whole day spent at Maadi drawing clothing & stores etc. from DADOS & with Lt Wallace, 2 Echelon. Lunched with Lt Wallace & Col. Alexander. Saw Major Pankhurst [Panckhurst?]<sup>307</sup> (GSO 2) & Public Relations re.

<sup>304</sup> (Brigade) Major Brian Bassett, aged 30, was killed on the morning of 5th of July 1942 during a Stuka attack on NZ 4th Brigade HQ. Bassett’s many letters to his wife, Joyce, were a major source for Angus Ross’s official history of the NZ 23rd Battalion, of which he had been Intelligence Officer (McLean, 2016, p. xv). In civilian life he was a solicitor and barrister (Kippenberger, 1949, p. 146). Harry Overton married Bassett’s sister, a nurse, in Egypt. Major Bassett’s remains were re-interred at El Alamein cemetery

<sup>305</sup> Both ORs with the unit

<sup>306</sup> In Sharia Elfi Bey

NZEF Times.

To Signal School of Instruction re. Leave for Bill over weekend.

To Town — Bill, Jack & Ernie & Self to Choubra [Shubra] — Dinner with Cohens. Jolly evening. Sent Bill home by taxi from Cairo.

[UWD] Very bad weather again today. Lt Roydhouse to locate Blue Band Track and then returned to camp, owing to weather conditions rendering work out of the question.

### **Saturday 13th February**

To Onnig's shop. Met M Dicran Papazian. Primus Stove — Gift from Onnig. Bill to town. Visited All Saints Cathedral & then along river bank as far as Bulac [Bulaq] Bridge. In evening to Onnig's Home. Onnig, Angele, Odette, Bill & Self to Kursaal<sup>308</sup> — Full House. Dinner at St James. Thence to Groppi's Rotunda.<sup>309</sup> Music & Dancing. House full of Drunken Yanks. One waltz with Madame Angele T. To Onnig's for Supper — Oriental Coffee & Vermouth.

Bill to Maadi by truck from Club.

### **Sunday 14th February**

Bill to Cairo early. To Mouski with Jack & Ern. Around the Bazaars. Visited Bekir Bey. Dinner at "Chrystal".

Bill to Maadi by Rail Car.

### **Monday 15th February**

To Mouski with Ern & Jack to buy perfume & Gazelle Skin bag.

To Bekir Bey. Bought 14 Karat Gold Signet Ring. Initials engraved on same. Dinner at Club. Bed early.

### **Tuesday 16th February**

To Mouski Street to buy Lamp nipples for Onnig.

To Onnig's Shop — Shopping.

Dined at Chrystal — Cohens, Bill, Jack & Ern.

Gave Bill Silver Chain for meat tickets.

Bill Home by Rail-Car.



[UWD] All hands busy cleaning old temporary crosses and repainting same for more use. General tidying of camp area. Truck away for rations. Returned at 1700 hours.

### **Wednesday 17th February**

*To Maadi.*

*Saw MS (Military Secretary) re. officers. Public Relations Office re. write-up of Unit. (see Appx I)*

*2 Echelon. Back to Cairo. To Mouski. Lunched with Bekir Bey. Real Oriental meal.*

*Tour of Bazaars.*

*Dinner at NZ Club.*

*Bed early.*

### **Thursday 18th February**

*To AD, GRE, to report end of Leave. Shopping & roaming town generally all day. Spent some time at Onnig's shop. To Onnig's home. Drank Zibib & dined with them. Then to "Diana" Cinema. Saw good show. "The Fleet's In".<sup>310</sup>*

*Very humorous.*

*Supper at M Papazian's.*

*Coffee as usual.*

*Very good.*

### **The Desert**

### **Friday 19th February**

*Left Cairo 1000 hrs. Endless convoy of Kiwi's crossing Desert Rd.*

*Lunch at Naafi Road House (Tents). To Alex. & Hostel.*

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<sup>307</sup> Probably Major Grey Panckhurst of the NZ 21st Battalion

<sup>308</sup> The Kursaal Cinema in Sharia Emad al Din. (Alternatively a casino and music hall on Sharia Alfi Bey)

<sup>309</sup> On Midan Soliman Pasha (now Midan Talaat Harb). The Rotunda was destroyed during the 1952 "Black Saturday" riots and not re-built

<sup>310</sup> 1942 musical starring Dorothy Lamour and William Holden, and featuring the music of Jimmy Dorsey and his band

*Saw Ken Thornton.*

*On Road again & back to our own stamping grounds 2230 hrs.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse and party working in area around "EW" Track in morning but returned to camp in afternoon owing to bad dust storm. Capt. von Schramm to AD, GRE, GHQ, MEF, and then left for camp. Travelled via Alexandria and arrived at Camp at 2230 hours after very tiring journey. Very heavy dust storm encountered while crossing desert via Desert Road. Conditions somewhat improved at camp site.

### **Saturday 20th February**

*Camp all day.*

### **Sunday 21st February**

*Camp all day.*

*Dust lifting.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse and party of ORs left at 0800 hours to proceed to Alex. to see football match. 2NZEF v. Rest Of Egypt. Unpleasant conditions in camp area all day. Interior economy and recreation.

### **Monday 22nd February**

*Terrific Dust Storm all day & night & heavy rain.*

*Dugout flooded.*

*Very Cold & miserable.*

*Unit in Camp all Day.*

### **Tuesday 23rd February**

*Storm continues unabated. Heavy Dust —*

*Very, Very Cold.*

*Primuses going all over the camp.*

### **Wednesday 24th February**

*Camp all day.*

*Very Cold & Dusty —  
Storm dies out at sunset.  
(Thank God).*

#### **Thursday 25th February**

*To Deir Umm Khawabir<sup>311</sup> Area & located about 40 unburied bodies.  
What a smell!<sup>312</sup> Concentrated them into Cemetery, El Alamein.  
Many Kiwis & balance Huns (Figure 67).  
Worked late at night on Returns.  
Very tired — Eyes gave out.*



**Figure 67**

Long-dead German soldier (photo: Lloyd Rogers)

#### **Friday 26th February**

*Back to Deir Umm Khawabir.  
Found a great number of bodies & remnants of bodies. God, what a*

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<sup>311</sup> c. 3 miles south of El Mreir

<sup>312</sup> Six months after the battle, this seems unlikely

*shambles. Our lads killed last June in retreat. Huns when the Kiwis counter attacked. Jerry paid for his cheek here & our cost was heavy. The futility of it all.*

*Oh! when will it all end? How homesick I have been of late. This job is getting me down after 18 months. Can I stick it?*

*I must. My eyes are going with the night work.*

[Once again there is a poor correspondence here between the dates in the personal diary and the dates in the Unit War Diary. For the 24th the latter reads:] Storm still blowing but abating. Lt Roydhouse to Mreir Area. Capt. von Schramm to Deir umm Khawabir Area. Located many unburied 2NZEF bodies and also many unburied Germans. Registered them [sic] location.

[For the 25th:] Lt Roydhouse to El Mreir Area to do Registration work. Capt. von Schramm to Deir Umm Khawabir Area. Located more unburied bodies. To El Alamein to contact Major Fry, Concentration Officer, re. the concentration of these bodies into El Alamein Cemetery. Very cold day.

[And for the 26th:] Lt Roydhouse to El Mreir Area to continue search for unlocated bodies. Capt. von Schramm to Deir um Khawabir to meet Capt. Lange and hand over bodies for concentration. Many more bodies located. Weather fine but cold.

### **Saturday 27th February**

*Several dozen more corpses at Deir Umm Khawabir. Will give this area a spell.*

*Office work till 0700 hrs. 28-2-43.*

*Very tired.*

### **Sunday 28th February**

*In Camp all day.*

*Washed clothes.*

*Office Work. Late night. Ironed clothes before bed.*

*Unit — Interior Economy & Recreation.*

## MARCH

### Monday 1st March

*To El Alamein to confer with Major Fry<sup>313</sup> (UDF) re. concentrations & rations (From El Daba).*

*Office work all afternoon & till late in evening. Had to give up owing to eye strain. Getting serious.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm to El Alamein to confer with Major Fry (UDF), OC, Concentration Unit at present stationed at the cemetery there. Thence back to Unit HQ and engaged upon Registration Reports in afternoon. Lt Roydhouse to El Mreir Area where large number of unmarked graves have been discovered. Carried out exhumations in most cases. Strong, cold wind. L Sgt Burt, Unit Draftsman [sic], left for office of AD, GRE, GHQ.

### Tuesday 2nd March

*To El Mreir Area. Then office work all afternoon.*

*Bed early — eyes gave right out.*

### Wednesday 3rd March

*Office work all day*

*Many AF [Army Form] W3372s & W3314s.*

### Thursday 4th March

*Office work all day.*

*Short trip through minefields (on foot) to west of Kaponga Box. Found good Solex carburettor on Armoured Car in minefield.*

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<sup>313</sup> Major R. Fry, the South African OC of 10 Graves Concentration Unit

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm, office work all day. Lt Roydhouse to Italian cemetery on Qattara Road to carry out exhumations in response to queries from 2NZE and AD, GRE, GHQ, MEF. Cold day. Strong winds with some dust.

### **Friday 5th March**

*Much typing of W3372s & Reports all day & till late at night.*

*Very tired & eyesore.*

*Three letters from "Curley" today.*

*Best tonic I could receive — God Bless Her.*

*Lt Roydhouse to Alex. to see Major Abe. [Kirk?] & make appointment for me to have eyes tested & seen to.*

*Goggles I expect.*

*Oh. Well!*

### **Saturday 6th March**

*Woke up feeling "Off Colour". Slept in till 0900 hrs. Have been very tired for some time lately. Am sure that the amount of night work in office is playing up with me. Eyes very sore, especially right eye. Must have them seen to next week. Office work all day & till late tonight. Will leave Weekly Returns till tomorrow.*

### **Sunday 7th March**

*Working near camp all day on foot.*

*HQ Truck in Hadra W/Shops, Alex., having springs re-tempered & other repairs executed.*

### **Monday 8th March**

*Working in "Fortress A" Area all day. (Kaponga Box).*

*Cold night.*

### **Tuesday 9th March**

*Working south of "Fortress A" all day.*

*Warm day — Cold night.*

**Wednesday 10th March**

*Orderly Room all day.*

*Compiling W3372s & W3314s.*

**Thursday 11th March**

*To Alamein & thence to El Daba to 131 SPS [?] re. scale of rations. Very inadequate.*

*Men complaining of lack of food. Something wrong somewhere.*

**Friday 12th March**

*To MR 2676 8615 [8615 2676]. Junction of Qattara Road & Phone Line to Lake Maghra. Located Hun Cemetery, 113 graves. Exhumed about 25 bodies. All badly smashed about & mostly head & neck wounds.*

*1 Unknown British Soldier.*

*Then to Hun MT W/Shops [Motor Transport Workshops] Area. Much salvage around here. Found nice vice. Large Twin-engined "Yankee" plane pancaked nearby. What a size!*

*Quiet night.*

**Saturday 13th March**

*Doing Plan of El Qattara Hun Cemetery & W3372s for same.*

*Also typing Roydhouse's 3372s & 3314s.*

*Across to "Fort" in evening & salvaged a lot of medical stores (& some Hun Soap).*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse to Ruweisat Ridge to continue registration and exhumation work there. Capt. von Schramm, office work all day. HQ Truck to Alamein to have holes for shock absorbers drilled in chassis channel irons. When rations arrived from Daba, found that issue was even less than it has been during the past week or two. Bread for instance cut down to slightly less than ½ lb per man, per day. Other items in same proportion. Most unsatisfactory as bread is staple part of ration supply.

### **Sunday 14th March**

*Washing Day. Very busy all day completing G [Graves] Registration & Burial Returns.*

*Extremely cold night.*

### **Monday 15th March**

*Orderly Room all day.*

*Collating W3372s & W3314s for despatch.*

*Cold night. Hot day.*

*No dust & little wind.*

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*Capt. Hart from HQ, Amiriya Zone, called re. salvage.*

### **Tuesday 16th March**

*Office All day. My truck to El Daba to collect rations.*

### **Wednesday 17th March**

*In office all day. Cpl Hawkins, Ptes Crutch & Perry to Qattaret el Diyura. Struck unmarked & invisible mines at 1000 hrs. Ford V-8 wrecked. Men walked 15 miles to Unit HQ — Badly shaken.*

*Lt Callagher [Callagher], RE Garrison Engineer, Alamein, called.*

[UWD] Lt Roydhouse to Mreir Area again. Usual registration and exhumation work. Capt. von Schramm in camp all day working on plans and reports of work done during past days. Lt Callagher, RE's Garrison Engineer, Alamein, called to discuss possibilities of locating much material left in the Fortress "A" Box by Egyptian contractors when they fled at the approach of the enemy last June. What a hope. Not a single item of the long list for which the civil firm claims compensation is to be found. Cpl Hawkins and 2 ORs to El Diyura to carry out a reconnaissance of that area and tracks there for future reference. At 1000 hours, when about 15 miles from Unit HQ, they discovered that they were in among many mines which



are not marked on any maps. While endeavouring to negotiate a return by the same track that they had entered this Area, they hit a mine and the resulting detonation wrecked the vehicle: Ford 15 cwt, WD [War Department] No L 4615713. No injuries received by any of the personnel but all were much shaken by the force of the explosion. Tramped the long trek back to Unit HQ carrying certain valuable equipment. This is the second vehicle lost in this particular area in three months. Have asked for the use of RE personnel to assist this Unit in its work in this dangerous area but without avail. Perhaps when one or more of men have been made casualties there will be something done to aid us in this respect. Fully 98% of the Field Work now being carried out by this Unit is being done in areas where there are known and marked minefields, but many mines are not known, nor marked. Work must be completed now as the danger from these mines increases daily with the action of the elements upon the mines in the ground. Cold and dirty night.

#### **Thursday 18th March**

*Office all day.*

*Sent Perry to Cairo (Hitch-Hiked from Alamein CMP [Corps of Military Police] Check-Post) to draw new truck.*

*Maj. Peek (DAD, GRE) called with Maj. Fry, OC, 10 Graves Concentration Unit.*

*Bad storm commenced at about 1600 hrs. Heavy dust & much rain.*

*Worst for 12 months. What a mess in the quarters.*

#### **Friday 19th March**

*All hands just hibernating till storm abates but no sign of break yet.*

*Still blowing howling gale all day & night.*

#### **Saturday 20th March**

*Storm still persists. All hands keep below ground. My room flooded out*

*with both dust & water.  
What a miserable life.*

### **Sunday 21th March**

*Rain stopped but still “dusting”. When will it stop?*

*In camp all day. Perry returned with 15 cwt Fordson. Loan till own vehicle can be replaced.*

### **Monday 22th March**

*To Deir Umm Khawabir in search of unburied bodies. Located & buried several Huns. Far gone.*

### **Tuesday 23th March**

*Ration Day.*

*Self in Camp all day — office Work.*

### **Wednesday 24th March**

*Truck being checked over.*

*In office all day.*

*Cold Wind & dust in afternoon.*

### **Thursday 25th March**

*Truck for rations.*

*Called to see Major Fry, OC, 10 GCU [Graves Concentration Unit].*

*Back to Camp at 1600 hrs.*

*Lt Stych arrived to take up duties with Unit.<sup>314</sup>*

*Heavy dust blow & rain from 1100 hrs.*

### **Friday 26th March**

*Office all morning.*

*Left for Alex. at 1400 hrs to be examined at Hospital. No*

*accommodation at Hostel. Stopped at “Sunny House” P<sub>T</sub> [piastres] 30  
for Room.*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm, working in office all morning. Lt Stych working in Field to west of Fortress “A”

in endeavour to locate certain NZ personnel reported to be buried there. No success. Capt. von Schramm left for El Alamein at 1500 hours and saw Major Fry, OC, 10 GCU. Thence to Alexandria to proceed to British General Hospital for medical examination.

### **Saturday 27th March**

*With Cpl Hawkins to Ophthalmic Specialist at 64 Gen. Hospital. My eyes perfect.*

*Sent to Medical Specialist. General Run-Down condition owing to clerical work & bad rations.*

*Spent couple of hours at Cecil Hotel with Harry & Myra Overton. Met Lt Chesney, RN, recently from POW Camp in Italy with Carl Ferguson.*

*Conditions in POW Camps — Just Hell.*

### **Sunday 28th March**

*Remained in Alex. today on Leave. Spent morning with Harry & Myra around town.*

*To Royal Cinema at 9.30 pm Session to see “Mrs Miniver”.<sup>315</sup>*

*Grand!*

### **Monday 29th March**

*Left for camp at 1400 hrs.*

*Called at HQ, Amiriya. Gone to see Capt. Hart but he was out.*

### **Tuesday 30th March**

*Office all day.*

*Sgt Acheson } NZ SIB [Special Investigation Branch]  
Cpl Petty }*

*arrived to make enquiries re. case of G.S. Roydhouse.*

*Pilfering money from dead.*

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<sup>314</sup> Kenneth Stych of the 6th Field Regiment Reinforcements. Promoted to Captain, Stych was later OC of 3 Section NZ GCU. In civilian life he was a cheese maker (Nominal Role, 1941. p. 459; Stych, 1944)

<sup>315</sup> *The classic wartime (1942) romantic drama directed by William Wyler and starring Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon*

[UWD] HQ truck to El Daba to draw rations, etc.  
Lt Stych working on the Ruweisat Ridge Area. Capt.  
von Schramm, office work all day. NZ SIB personnel  
arrive to conduct certain enquiries in area. Remained  
overnight.

### **Wednesday 31st March**

*All day with SIB. Personnel getting statements from certain men of Unit  
re. case.*

*Worked till 1.30 am typing statements, etc.*

## **APRIL**

### **Thursday 1st April**

*Continued investigations in morning.*

*To Gebel Sanhur Ital. Cemetery to look for grave of Lt Col. Prince  
Ruspoli.<sup>316</sup> No Luck.*

*To Qattara Road & to Camp.*

### **Friday 2nd April**

*SIB left.*

*Capt. von Schramm — office all Day.*

### **Saturday 3rd April**

*Office Work All Day.*

[UWD] HQ truck to El Daba to draw rations. Absent  
till late in afternoon. Capt. von Schramm typing  
W3372s and doing cemetery sketches, etc., all day.  
Lt Stych working on Registration reports all day. His  
truck being overhauled and greased.

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<sup>316</sup> Tenente Colonnello Marescotti Ruspoli of the 186th (Folgore) Parachute Regiment was killed in the Deir el Munassib area on the 24th of October 1942. His brother Prince Costantino of the 187th was killed nearby two days later

**Sunday 4th April***Interior Economy.**Heavy Dust & Rain.**No clothes washing.***Monday 5th April***To Deir Um Khawabir. Located many Huns & two Kiwis & buried them.**Pretty bad state.**Office in afternoon.*

[UWD] Lt Stych, searching areas on Ruweisat Ridge all day. Capt. von Schramm working on north side of Deir umm Khawabir and thence south towards the bed of the Deir. Located several German dead and two New Zealanders, unburied. Buried these bodies. All dead, both Germans and New Zealanders, had been searched and well-rifled by roaming Bedouins. In all cases, wallets, purses and other items were found lying near the bodies. All wallets and purses had been cut open. In spite of recent strong dust storms, it was evident that all these bodies had been disturbed, as if they had been undisturbed, the sand would have been piled around the bodies. Contrary to this, the bodies had in all cases, been turned over and a clear patch of ground left exposed so that it was evident that the looting had taken place quite recently. Heavy, cold showers fell during the day and much more rain after nightfall. Heavy rains continued all night.

**Tuesday 6th April**

[No personal diary entry.] HQ truck to El Daba for rations, petrol, etc. Capt. von Schramm working on 3372s and sketch plans and other office work all day. Lt

Stych to area to east of Qattara Road, north of camp.  
Located several plots and a small enemy cemetery.

### **Wednesday 7th April**

[No personal diary entry. The Unit War Diary reads:]  
Capt. von Schramm to kilo 43, Pipeline Road, south of camp, to search for graves and also to endeavour to find any enemy cemeteries which should be in that area, according to reports received through International Red Cross, but without success. Located wreckage of large British plane and found seven graves nearby. No means of identification. Also isolated enemy graves.  
Lt Stych to Qattara Road again. Located two more enemy cemeteries, one Italian and other, German. Many exhumations to be carried out in these plots.

### **Thursday 8th April**

*Two months to Curley Top's Birthday. Present MUST be away about now at latest. What to send?*  
*My truck away for rations, etc.*  
*In office all day.*

### **Friday 9th April**

*Office all day. Snorting dust storm from 1000 hrs. Life very unpleasant.*  
*Feeling very Homesick.*  
*How I miss my CT [Curley Top].*

[UWD] Capt. von Schramm compiling reports and completing sketch plans all day. Lt Stych to El Taqa Plateau area to endeavour to locate several plots of British graves. Severe dust storm commenced about 1100 hours, rendering field work impossible. Conditions very unpleasant in camp all night.

### **Saturday 10th April**

*Camp all day. Dust still blowing very strongly. Rotten!*

*Visited by British Lt Col. & Major at 1100 hrs.*

*Sfax falls. Army rushes on.*

*Yippee!*

*Great yarn with Ken Stych. Find that he is old Albertian.*

### **Sunday 11th April**

*Dust blowing all day. Stopped in my dugout & did odd jobs, etc.*

*Early night.*

### **Monday 12th April**

*Office work all day.*

[UWD] Lt Stych to El Himeimat Area to search for graves of 6 Green Howards. Large party of Senior Egyptian Army Officers guided by Lt Col. GYDEN and Major Foster, both of the British Mission to the Egyptian Army, arrived at 1000 hours on tour of Alamein Battle Front. Called to examine Fortress "A" Area. Capt. von Schramm acted as guide over area and explained certain of the prominent features of this Area. Party left at 1230 hours. Capt. von Schramm working in office in afternoon. Slight dust storm commenced late in afternoon and continued towards evening. Wind very cold.

### **Tuesday 13th April**

*Left for Alexandria via Alamein. Stopped at YMCA. Hostel overnight.*

*Shopping.*

### **Wednesday 14th April**

*Wedding. 44831 Pte Tom Baverstock to Miss K.G. HAIK.*

*St. Marks Church — Reception at NZ YMCA Hostel. Padre J.F. Judson.*

*Stopped at Hostel overnight.*

### **Thursday 15th April**

*Left for Cairo in Fordson 15 cwt. Called HQ, Amiriya Zone, re. phone & saw Major Pratt,<sup>317</sup> Capts Hart & Smither. Lunched with A/N [?] officers.*

*Arrived Cairo 1700 hrs. Booked in at NZ Club. To see Onnig — not at shop — called at flat. Found he was in Hospital at Gizeh [Giza?]. Dined with Madame Angele & Papazians.*

### **Friday 16th April**

*To HQ, GRE, re. truck.  
NZ Base Pay Office.  
2 Echelon, 2NZE.*

*Onnig operated on. Bad show. Severe bleeding — Glucose injections. To Hospital with M Papazian. Onnig conscious for few minutes. Saw him & was recognised. Took Angele & her Father Home.*

*To Bed early.*

### **Saturday 17th April**

*To:*

*AAG, O2E [Assistant Adjutant General, 2 Echelon], 2NZE.*

*APM [Assistant Provost Martial], 2NZE, & SIB.*

*BTE [British Troops in Egypt] re. maps*

*Early evening.*

### **Sunday 18th April**

*To HQ, Directorate, GRE.*

*To Maadi — then to Egyptian Police College. Great show.*

*Saw horses — Dogs (NIMR [?]).*

*Dined with Angele & Papazians. Wee Colette makes fuss of me.*

*What a lovely kiddie.*

### **Monday 19th April**

*To APM, DADOS, O2E, 2NZE.*

*“Metropol” to see “Desert Victory”.<sup>318</sup>*

*Not so hot.*

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<sup>317</sup> Assistant Adjutant General, HQ, Amiriya Zone

<sup>318</sup> Oscar winning documentary directed by the “Boulting Brothers” Roy Boulting. Desert Victory was not a favourite with the troops (e.g. Douglas, 1946 [1966], p. 18)



**Tuesday 20th April**To:*NZ Reception Depot to give evidence in Roydhouse Case. Bad Show.**AAG, O2E, & Chief Post Office, 2NZEF.**Drew maps at BTE.**YMCA HQ (Soliman Pasha).**To HQ, GRE, at 1700 hrs.**Dined with Papazians.***Wednesday 21st April***To AAG, HQ, 2NZEF, re. new Postings to Unit — DAQMG [Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General] re. collecting men.**Stationary Office, 2NZEF. AAG, O2E, 2NZEF.**Early night.***Thursday 22nd April 43 April***Worked at NZ Chief Post office.**Dined at Chez Papazian.***Friday 23rd April***[Good Friday circled]**To Hospital to see Onnig. Very touching visit. Still very ill man. Took Angele to Flat in Taxi.**Lunch at Club.**Worked at Post Office.**To Mouski to see Bekir Bey.**To Post Office.**Met Bekir Bey at Shepherd's<sup>319</sup> & then to Russian Club & Junior Club.**(VODKA!)**Dined with Bekir Bey.*

[UWD] Lt Stych working in El Diyura Area. Capt. von Schramm to HQ, 2NZEF, & Central YMCA, Maadi

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<sup>319</sup> Shepherd's Hotel on Sharia Ibrahim Pasha. The original Shepherd's Hotel was destroyed during the 1952 "Black Saturday" riots

Camp, to collect comforts for Unit. Rest of day spent at NZ Chief Post Office working on official duties.

**Saturday 24th April**

*To Heliopolis — Maadi Camp.*

*AAG, 2NZE.*

*Collected Bedford from HQ, GRE.*

**Sunday 25th April**

ANZAC DAY.

*Holiday in Cairo.*

**Monday 26th April**

*Left Cairo 1100 hrs. Called at Hospital & saw Onnig & Angele. To Alex. via Amiriya. Hostel full. Stopped at Sunny House Again.*

*Evening at Springbok Club.*

*Shem el Nessim.<sup>320</sup>*

*Waugh Holiday.*

[UWD] Lt Stych to El Mreir Area to carry out routine work. Capt. von Schramm to Maadi Camp to collect new personnel for Unit and then left Cairo at 1100 hours for Alexandria, via Amiriya, where stopped to see AAG, HQ, Amiriya Zone, re. telephone. Saw Signals Officer re. same. To Alexandria. Arrived at 1730 hours. Bedford to Hadra W/Shops to have thermostat adjusted.

**Tuesday 27th April**

*Left Alex at 1300 hrs for camp. Had to detour via Amiriya, owing to large ship being on fire & beached near Seagull Camp, Dekheila. Called Alamein Cemetery & off-loaded crosses. On to Camp.*

*Absent exactly 2 weeks.*

**Wednesday 28th April**

*Catching up on office work.*

*New clerk — Cpl J.S. McNeil — getting Files organised. Good man.*

**Thursday 29th April***Office work all day.***Friday 30th April***Office work all day.***MAY****Saturday 1st May***Office Work. Harry Overton came down for day.*

[UWD] Maintenance work carried out on Unit vehicles.  
 HQ truck to El Daba for rations, etc. Lt Stych and Capt.  
 von Schramm, office work all day. Temperature rising  
 daily and flies becoming troublesome once again.

**Sunday 2nd May***Interior Economy. Washing & Ironing, etc.***Monday 3rd May***Office work all day.***Tuesday 4th May***Office All Day**Heat Extreme.***Wednesday 5th May**

*All Unit to site of wreck of Chevrolet truck. After clearance of mines,  
 truck recovered & towed to Camp. Minor overhaul & engine started  
 without any trouble.*

**Thursday 6th May**

*Another recovery job. Collected Jeep from a minefield. Replaced rear-right  
 wheel & away she went.*

*Office work.*


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<sup>320</sup> Shem el Nessim ("smelling the breeze") was a high end scent. It was marketed as "The scent of Araby". Presumably this was Wally's birthday gift to "Curley Top"

### Friday 7th May

*Fall of Tunis.*

*Fall of Bizerte* } *within 6 mins of one another.*

*Med. [Mediterranean] Sea open at last.*

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*Office Work All Day.*



**Figure 68**

Visit by the NZ Minister of Defence, Fred Jones (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)

### Saturday 8th May

*Paraded whole unit at junction of Coast & Springbok Roads at 1030 hrs.*

*Hon. F. Jones, Minister of Defence (Figure 68), arrived late (1120 hrs).*

*Talks & promises to Unit — visit cemetery & then I conducted tour of Ruweisat Ridge. Lunch on Ridge.*

*Heat up to 113°F in shade — if the shade could be found.*

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*Strong Khamsin wind blowing.*

**Sunday 9th May****MOTHERS' DAY.***Interior Economy & Recreation.**Office work & Letter Writing.*

[UWD] Interior Economy and Recreation. Whole unit to Alamein in afternoon for swim in the sea. Weather very hot with strong Khamsin wind blowing.

**Monday 10th May***Out to north along Qattara Road. Located dump of petrol. Good find.**Temperature much cooler.**Office work in afternoon.***Tuesday 11th May***Truck for rations. Time there was some mail. None for more than week.**Not even official?**To Qattaret El Diyura & then back to office.***Cairo****Wednesday 12th May**

*Left Fortress A at 1000 hrs & Alamein at 1100 hrs. Arrived NZ CPO 1800 hrs. Then to NZ Reception Depot & Marched In there. Called at Base Kit Store.*

*Early night.***Thursday 13th May**

*FGCM [Field General Court Martial] (Roydhouse) opened 0900 hrs in Hut no 430, NZ BR Depot [BRD — Base Reception Depot].<sup>321</sup> On stand for over 4 hrs — very trying & very hot. Finished my evidence at 1830 hrs.*

*To Club & to Onnig's. Met all family: Onnig — Angele — Colette & Armand & Papazians — M & Mme & Dicran & Odette.*

*Onnig in bed — still very sick.*


---

<sup>321</sup> The Base Reception Depot was responsible for personnel management

*Contacted 9 IB [NZ 9 Infantry Battalion] Truck at Club & hitch-Hiked to Maadi.*

### **Friday 14th May**

*FGCM continued till late in evening. On call all day.*

*Called at 2 Ech. [Echelon], 2NZE;*

*DAAG re. Pistol theft<sup>322</sup> & new Photographer.*

*Dinner at Club — Saw Burt Aylett & had a beer with him.*

*Called on Morriss.*

*Finished up at Club & then back to Maadi by train.*

### **Saturday 15th May**

*To DADOS, DDMS, Medical Stores & 23 NZ Fd [Field] Ambulance.*

*FGCM continued today.<sup>323</sup>*

*Saw Jim Cranswick.*

*Marched out from NZ BRD.*

*To Club — no beds & went to "SATO" Pension. Booked bed in room with 5 Naval officers. Spent evening at Club in Mess (Staff), to Satos at 12.15 & found bed occupied. Raised Merry Hell. Bad night with bed bugs.*

### **Sunday 16th May**

*To Maadi re. photographer & collected Medical Stores (23 Fd Ambulance).*

*Sid Josland went out with me. To Club. Lunched with Smithy from NZ CPO.*

*Siesta — Shops all closed.*

*Spent evening in Club Staff Mess.*

*Had a row at Sato's over charge for Bed only. PT 50 (10/-).*

*Reported it to APM, Cairo Area.*

*Sato's "Out of Bounds" now. [circled]*

### **Monday 17th May**

*To HQ, Graves Directorate [GRE].*

*Lunch at Club.*

*To Heliopolis Sporting Club with Sid Josland.*

*Dined with Onnig & Family at Chez Tchakedjian.*

*Harry arrived from Alamein.*

## **Tuesday 18th May**

RAIN.

*Post Office in morning.*

*To Matarieh<sup>324</sup> in afternoon to Chez Onnig's father — met all family.*

*Happy afternoon.*

*RAIN — never before known to fall in May.*

## **Wednesday 19th May**

RAIN.

*To 2NZE re. photographer.*

*Stores from DADOS.*

*Shopping in afternoon & Siesta.*

*Dined with Morriss & Mrs M.*

*Early night.*

[UWD] Lt Stych to Mreir Area all day. Capt. von Schramm to DAAG, 2NZE, re. Unit photographer and thence to DADOS re. stores. (Collected same). Rain in Cairo for the first time known to fall in May. Also light rain in Unit Camp. Lt S.J. McDougall<sup>325</sup> joined Unit and left for Unit HQ.

## **Thursday 20th May**

*Left for Alexandria.*

<sup>323</sup> Wally's webbing belt with his service revolver, spare ammunition and prismatic compass had "disappeared" from the cab of his unit lorry in Cairo the previous month (Schramm, 1943)

<sup>322</sup> This is the last we hear of the Court Martial. Whether Roydhouse was found guilty or not is unknown but he is referred to in the 2NZE *Nominal Role* for 1944 as a Lieutenant, so presumably not. His service with the NZGREU, however, was at an end

<sup>324</sup> A suburb to the east of Cairo and the location of ancient Heliopolis

<sup>325</sup> Stuart McDougall, 2nd NZ Divisional Cavalry

*Large Oil tanker on fire in harbour (Sabotaged).*

*Night at NZ Hostel.*

*Evening at Springbok Club. Supper with Cpl O. VAN DE BLERK.*

### **The Desert**

#### **Friday 21st May**

*Left Alex. at 1100 hrs.*

*Arrived Camp at 1500 hrs.*

*Lots of mail awaiting me & lots from Eva.*

*Early night.*

*First "Most Secret" Memo re. the Repatriation plan.*

#### **Saturday 22nd May**

*Office Work all day.*

*Lot of leeway to make up.*

*Lt Col. Mallet, FFC,<sup>326</sup> called.*

#### **Sunday 23rd May**

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

*Col. Mallet arrived & was billeted here.*

#### **Monday 24th May**

*Long trip. Left 0800 hrs for SAMAKET GABALLA.<sup>327</sup>*

*Long & Devious routed trip.*

*Located grave of Lt Col. AMILAKVARI DIMITRI (Figure 69)<sup>328</sup> & bust concrete off same. Body in huge coffin. Loaded onto truck.*

*To Deir el Ragil & collected unknown Frenchman — Then to Deir el Daayis & lifted a number of Froggies.*

*To Alamein Cemetery & then camp. 1900 hrs.*

*Col. Mallet far from sociable sort.*

#### **Tuesday 25th May**

*To Daba for rations. To Signal office re. Phone, etc. To Hospital (Indian) re. Jack's teeth.*

*Rest of Unit to Munassib Area (much against my will) with Lt Col. Mallet,*





**Figure 69**

The desert grave of Prince Dimitri Amilakvari (photo: unknown French soldier)

<sup>326</sup> Colonel Richard Mallet, a WWI veteran and early adherent of De Gaulle. Mallet, who at this time was in his 60s, was charged by the General with the development of the Bir Hakeim cemetery and effectively became Free France's Graves Concentration Officer for North Africa.

At his funeral in 1948, Général de Larminat, commander of the Free French Forces, said of him: "Le colonel Mallet se consacrait à la pieuse tâche de rechercher les corps des nôtres, qui, déjà nombreux, jalonnaient le désert de Libye, les identifier, les réunir et leur élever des monuments dignes d'eux. Sans relâche, il parcourut les champs de bataille de Bir-Hakeim, d'El Alamein, plus tard de Tunisie, sans souci des risques courus au milieu des champs de mines non signalés et des projectiles de toute sorte non éclatés et certaines de ces missions furent marquées de tragiques accidents. Il s'était donné tout entier à cette œuvre de pitié" (Fondation de la France Libre, 2011)

The Free French were known as *France Combattante*. The name *Forces Françaises Combattantes* (FFC) usually applies to the Free French in France (the French resistance, latter the FFI)

<sup>327</sup> At the southern end of the El Alamein line, c. 8632 4314 (Figure 58)

<sup>328</sup> Commander of the 13<sup>e</sup> Demi-Brigade de Légion Étrangère, killed on the 24th of October 1942, during fighting at el Himeimat. The Colonel was aged 35

*FFC.*

*Fordson truck blown up & Pte Bob Gasgoigne badly injured & Pte George Putt suffering from shock.*

*Stormy scene with Col. Mallet & I refused to continue search for him owing to danger to men.*

*Received Instructions re. Repatriation to NZ.*

### **Wednesday 26th May**

*Office all day. Flu getting better. R Sigs [Royal Signals] men overhauling Phone line.*

### **Thursday 27th May**

*Office work all day. Don't know if I am a clerk or a Field officer — Maleesh.*

### **Friday 28th May**

*Field Work all day.*

*Very tired.*

*Await further news re. repatriation to Enzed.*

*Will I be "In"? I have a feeling that I will.*

### **Saturday 29th May**

*To el Diyura Area all day.*

### **Sunday 30th May**

*Interior Economy & Recreation.*

*Had a good Siesta.*

*[UWD] Interior Economy and Recreation. Cricket match.*

*Visit of NZ LRDG [Long Range Desert Group] men.*

### ***Ruapehu***

Much to his delight, Wally, as a married non-specialist junior officer, was automatically included amongst the nearly 6000 men that comprised the 2NZEF's first furlough draft, codenamed "Ruapehu" (after New Zealand's largest active volcano). His departure was sudden to say the least. Within 15 days of being notified of his leave,

he was on board the former Dutch passenger liner, the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, headed for home. Wally's war was over. Before that, however, there were days of hectic preparatory and administrative work, and farewells to be made to his friends in Cairo. What there was not, were any regrets. His departure and his imminent return to New Zealand and his "Curley Top" are presented as wholly good.

Despite the stresses of the previous months and his subsequent trajectory, in the weeks before and after his embarkation for New Zealand, the themes of the diary are for the most part unchanged. Perhaps surprisingly, he had not lost his religious faith; he still comes over as uxorious; and there are also the usual repeated references to the mail, his health, shopping, the weather and the minutiae of army administration. He was not, however, the complaisant army insider that he had been. The contrast between his earlier lack of personal reflection and his delight at being included in the furlough draft is also striking. After a deployment of over three years, he wanted out, and it is no doubt significant that though not qualified on age or family grounds, he was to be one of the majority of the "Ruapehu" draft who did not return to the war.

Nonetheless he left Egypt on the *Nieuw Amsterdam* in many respects the same person that had arrived on the *Duchess of Bedford* so many months earlier. The disappointment he was to come home to, therefore, was perhaps less do with the impact of the war on him, as his absence because of it. Or perhaps the problem was something else entirely? Unfortunately there is no way now of knowing one way or another. But with the benefit of hindsight, we can suggest that the war in the desert, which he was now so enthusiastically leaving, had been his finest hour.

### **Monday 31st May**

*To El Alamein to rendezvous with Commander, 16 Area (Brigadier). Discussion of topics of general interest & promised engineers & Detection apparatus.*

SPECIAL!

*Received lists of officers to be repatriated to New Zealand.  
What excitement — and found my own name among them.  
I really don't know how to set down on paper, my feelings — I cannot. To  
be back with my Beloved again after 3 years, 3–4 months (approx.).  
Praise God.*

[UWD] Lt Stych to Ruweisat Ridge Area all day. Lt McDougall to area to west of Fortress "A" and Qattara Road. Capt. von Schramm to El Alamein to meet Commander, 26 Area, on tour of inspection. Discussed problems vital to Unit's welfare and to efficient carrying out of registration work in mined areas. Capt. von Schramm returned to camp and commenced packing in readiness for move on instructions from Military Secretary as per special Secret Order.

JUNE

**Tuesday 1st June**

*From my wee book: "Praise Ye". "Bless the Lord, O my soul, & forget not all his benefits". Psalms ciii, 2.*

*Did not get to bed till 0400 hrs. Very busy packing. What a lot of gear one can gather together & so much that is hard to part with.*

*Worked in office all day & till 2245 hrs.*

*Very tired but too, too excited to notice it — Maleesh.*

**Wednesday 2nd June**

*Working in office all day to prepare things for my successor. Wonder who?*

*Perhaps Harry Overton?*

[UWD] Both Lts to the same as above. Cpl Porter (Draftsman) [sic] out to erect crosses over graves of Unknown soldiers who have now been identified. Capt. von Schramm, Office work all day.

**Thursday 3rd June**

*Office work all day.*

*Received Instruction No 9 re. repatriation. (Re. ORs).*

*[UWD] HQ truck to Daba for rations, fuel and petrol.  
Capt. von Schramm working with clerk on Provisional  
lists and other office work all day. Lt McDougall working  
at western end of El Mreir Depression all day. Lt Stych  
working in area around January Gates in minefields.  
Further instructions received regarding "Ruapehu".*

**Friday 4th June**

*In camp all day. Office Work & odd jobs. Still packing.*

*Don't know how I can get all my belongings down to the maximum  
number of packages.*

*1800 hrs Received instructions re. joining 9 Infantry Bde, Maadi, WEF  
[with effect from] 1/6/43.*

*1900 hrs Harry Overton arrived & took over command of Unit WEF  
2/6/43.*

*Very busy till I am finishing packing — Such a problem.*

**Saturday 5th June**

*Left El Diyura at 0920 hrs. Alamein at 1030 hrs. Lunched at Wadi  
Natrun & onto RAF (Halifax & Liberator) Landing Ground. Fan belt  
broke & truck disabled. Tried for aid at LG but no go. Tried string in place  
of belt — no go. Crawled very slowly for 30 Kilo[s] to REME [Royal  
Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] at Cowley [Camp], Mena.  
To Base Post Office — called & saw Morriss & Onnig — To Maadi &  
spent 2½ hrs trying to "March In" but did not seem to be wanted. Finally  
into 21 Bn after 3 yrs absence from them. Very tired & dirty — Soon  
asleep. Bad dust storm from Wadi Natrun [on].*

*I am so excited — I cannot express my feelings. Salutations from  
Papazians & Tchakedjians to Eva.*

**Sunday 6th June**

*Very busy handing in all surplus gear & being "Marched In" to 21 Bn APR [?].*

*Collected Base kit & repacked.*

*Town in Afternoon but few shops open. Bought a few items & then to Club for bath. Then Haircut & to Onnig's for tea & dinner. Great farewell from Onnig & Family & Papazian Family — to Maadi Camp & bed at midnight.*

*Heavy day tomorrow. Wonder what my Love is doing & thinking tonight?*

### **Monday 7th June**

*Very Busy day — Typing out many Rolls for embarkation. Platoon Rolls — Rolls by Ranks — nominal Rolls & 4 x Baggage Rolls by destinations. Kept going all day.*

*Paraded at Camp Hospital at 1415 hrs for re-vaccination. Reaction should be slight but too early to say.*

*Doing more rolls in evening after Dinner. Dust storm all day. Very hot in afternoon.*

*Extremely tired tonight — Arm a little sore from “scratches”. Maybe this accounts for the tiredness. All heavy baggage away tonight.*

### **Tuesday 8th June**

*Curley Top's Birthday (1907).*

*Dearly Beloved, how clearly I See,  
Somewhere in Heaven, You were fashioned for Me  
Angel eyes knew You, Angel voices led me to You.  
Nothing could save me, they gave me a sign.  
I know that I'll be Yours, come rain or shine  
So I say, Merely — Dearly Beloved, Be Mine.<sup>329</sup>*

*[Sandwiching the above] Very busy all morning typing more & more rolls & keeping them up to date as men are continually arriving from Tripoli, mostly by air. Called at Pay Office re. payment for Pistola [sic], etc. Queried amount charged & saw DADOS but have been well & truly “Stung” & had to pay £S 8 (Under Protest).*

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<sup>329</sup> The words of the 1942 song *Dearly Beloved* by Johnny Mercer (music by Jerome Kern)

Wrote to Harry Overton, Bill & also to my Sweetheart as it is her Birthday. Very tired so to bed at 2200 hrs.  
Cold wind & dust — Hot during day. Still blowing — Cold at night but terrible heat from 1400 hrs to sunset.  
All my most Fond thoughts are with my Darling Sweetheart, Red, Red Rose.

### **Wednesday 9th June**

Extremely busy — much typing of revised rolls & then more typing.  
Away to town to spend my few remaining ackers on bits & pieces for Eva.  
Home early & bed at 9 pm.

### **Thursday 10th June**

Orderly Room in morning — Thence to Base Pay Office & drew £E 1. (Credit Very low).  
Great Surprise: Came out of Pay [Office] & met Bill of all people & then Bert Aylett. Great yarn with Bill. Bill came to my cubicle in afternoon & stopped till tea time.

### **Friday 11th June**

Orderly Room all morning. To Mena (Cowley Camp) to 9 IB [Infantry Battalion] re. mail but no luck.  
Called NZ CPO re. mail.

Bill was up from 1400–1530 hrs today.  
Early night.

### **Saturday 12th June**

Pottered about in Orderly Room all morning. Siesta in afternoon.  
No sign of Bill.  
Jack Lloyd brought mail to me late tonight. Two from Eva. Had late supper with Jerry Moore.<sup>330</sup> Bread — Sheep's Tongues.

### **Sunday 13th June**

Paraded with 21 Bn & rest of 5th Bde & 28th Bn for Church Service by

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<sup>330</sup> Captain Gerald (Ted) Moore of the NZ 21st Battalion

*Bishop Gerard. Just the same as ever. Sermon had a sharp & very telling sting in its tail.*

*No sign of Bill again (?)*

*Siesta — Heat terrible.*

### **Monday 14th June**

*Final check of rolls — Kit inspection of men's kits. Wrote letters all morning & repacked luggage. Tried to sleep in afternoon but impossible owing to flies & heat. Real Khamsin blowing. Bill & Arnie Powell<sup>331</sup> came up this afternoon. Both looking very fit & well. Had last real fresh water shower till (?)*

*Much dust blowing.*

*Bill came back again at 8.30 pm & stayed till 10.30 pm. Also saw Charlie Cato.*

### **Tuesday 15th June**

*Up at 0245. Breakfast at 0300 hrs. Embussed & left Maadi at 0445 hrs En Route to Suez. Halfway House at 0645 hrs. Tewfik 0830 hrs. Pic[nic?] & tea at NZ YMCA & on to barges at 1030 hrs — Boarded "Nieuw Amsterdam" (Figure 70)<sup>332</sup> at 1100 hrs. Settling in. Sailed from Tewfik at 1930 hrs down Gulf of Suez. Very hot Khamsin wind blowing.*

### **Wednesday 16th June**

*First muster Stations this morning at 1000 hrs. 440 all told to 20 rafts. Very hot today.*

*Ship most steady. Steaming at 22 knots without effort & passed several other vessels today going same way. Pay parade. Drew £2 in NZ currency. Overcast in afternoon. Estimated that we are covering 594 miles every 24 hours — Wonderful.*

*Crossed Tropic of Cancer at about 2000 hrs.*

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<sup>331</sup> ?Trooper Arnold Powell of the NZ 4th Armoured Brigade

<sup>332</sup> The Nieuw Amsterdam was a Dutch passenger liner converted into an armed troopship. Owing to her great speed she often sailed unescorted. During her military service she covered more than 500,000 nautical miles and carried a total of 378,361 troops. She was scrapped in 1974





**Figure 70**  
HMT Nieuw Amsterdam in 1943 (photo: unknown)

### **Thursday 17th June**

*Probably our hottest day today. Humidity beyond description. All clothing wet through with perspiration.*

*Boat Stations 1430 hrs till 1530 hrs. Stood in full sun for whole hour. Simply beyond a joke.*

*Conditions on Ship very miserable. On deck for two hrs. Passed the "Hundred Isles" en route towards Perim light but did not see Perim light.*

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*As we left Cairo with clocks one hour ahead (Egyptian Summer time) our time was correct at Aden [or?] as if we had advanced clocks 1 hour for travelling though 15° (i.e. from 30° to 45°).*

### **Friday 18th June**

#### **FULL MOON**

*Into Gulf of Aden and anchored at Aden at 1000 hrs. Violently ill all night — Bad attack of Dysentery — much vomiting, etc. Remained in bed all*

day till "Boat Stations" at 1500 hrs to 1530 hrs. Heat becoming very intense during late afternoon. Still very sick & retching. Steward blames lettuce Salad. Many [other] officers ill also. Managed to drink two cups of strong tea at 1600 & felt better for them. Missed out on most of dinner. Spent a very wretched night at ADEN with no breeze. Bed early but did not sleep.

### **Saturday 19th June**

Cool breeze today.

At anchor till 1730 & then out into roadstead & remained all night.

Heat at night most oppressive.

Large convoy outside boom. Mostly laden tankers.

Much tropical lightning.

### **Sunday 20th June**

Off again at 0545 hrs — due South for 3 hrs & then Eastwards. Joined "Dominion Monarch" at 1100 hrs.

"SOUTHERN CROSS" in sight at about 20° to 25° above southern horizon at 2100 hrs.

—

Slept on deck till 2300 hrs but very muggy & damp so down to cabin.

Heat terrible. Maleesh — we're going Home at last.

ADVANCED CLOCKS ½ HR AT 2400 hrs.

### **Monday 21st June**

Clocks on ½ hr at 2400 hrs.

Tummy ache during night.

Course — due South.

Very heavy sea — ship tossing & pitching a fair amount. Spray coming in port at least 60 ft above sea level. Temperature down at least 10°.

Storm increased all day till by mid-afternoon we are having a real Monsoon.

Self very sea-sick & no wonder.

Ship making much southing. Joined by HMS Sussex [HMS Suffolk]<sup>333</sup> at dawn.

**Tuesday 22nd June**

*Clock on ½ hr at 2400.*

*Monsoon abated slightly. Many, many officers & troops still ill. Self much better — down for all meals. Spent most of day on Sun Deck. Ship rolling very badly. Bad sea ship. Pitches, tosses & Rolls in one motion — regular corkscrew of a boat. Temperature down considerably but very muggy in cabin after blackout.*

**Wednesday 23rd June**

*Clocks Advanced ½ hr at 2400 hrs.*

*On deck in morning. Nice & fresh. Stomach still unsettled after bad food. Reported to MO this am. Sent to Treatment Centre for medicine.*

*Large dose Caster Oil at 1000 hrs*

*Chlorodyne<sup>334</sup> at 1400 hrs*

*at 1800 hrs.*

*All guns (not 6") did practice shoot at 1400 hrs. Starboard battery excellent shoot. Port not so good.*

*On deck after dinner very dark. Checked coarse by Southern Cross.*

*Muggy in cabin.*

*Clocks have now been advanced a total of 3 hrs from Cairo or 45°.*

**Thursday 24th June**

*Clock on ½ hr.*

*Up very early (Thanks to Castor oil & rest of medicine). Much relief.*

*Dominion Monarch & Suffolk left us at 1400 hrs. New escort came from eastwards — County class cruiser.<sup>333</sup> Speed of ship now increased to 22 knots from 18. Seas moderate. Temperature much lower but very muggy in lounge & cabins after blackout.*

*Feeling very fit again now.*

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<sup>333</sup> HMS Suffolk was a County-class heavy cruiser, best known for her role in tracking the Bismarck during the battle of the Denmark Strait. She survived the war and was scrapped in 1948

<sup>334</sup> A highly addictive over-the-counter medicine made from chloroform, hemp and opium used in the treatment of, among other things, diarrhoea

### Friday 25th June

*Clock on ½ hr.*

*Boat drill at 1000 hrs — quite unexpected & as it should be. Rain commenced to fall at 1000 hrs. Seas increasing. Heavy seas by 1400 hrs. Ship rolling, tossing & pitching. Plenty of rain. Waves come into portholes. Pay today. Drew £5—3—5.*

*Storm increasing. Wind coming from SSE. Ship bucking a lot. Heavy rain. Cruiser did a “shoot” well away to NNE.*

### Saturday 26th June

*Clock on ½ hr.*

*Monsoon blowing at full strength from SSE. Ship drawing right into it at 21 Knots & pitching & tossing very badly all day.*

*Heavy rain on & off.*

*Kiwi Concert Party in 1st Class Dining Room (no 1 Mess). On deck with Clyde. Heavy rain. Bed at 2200 hrs.*

*Feeling very fit & well in spite of bad weather.*

### Sunday 27th June

*Should cross Tropic of Capricorn today.*

*?*

*Sea still very high & ship doing all her usual antics but not worrying me at all. Still many down with mal de mare [sic]. Wind exceptionally strong & most bitterly cold.*

*Course — due South.*

*No alteration to clocks tonight.*

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<sup>335</sup> HMS Sussex. Another county-Class heavy cruiser.

According to the Eastern Fleet War Diary, “[HMS Sussex] sailed on the 24th to MOMP [mid ocean meet point] with [HMS] KENYA, escorting NIEUW AMSTERDAM and DOMINION MONARCH. Escorted NIEUW AMSTERDAM to MOMP on the 28th with Netherlands cruiser TROMP, thereafter proceeding independently to Mauritius”.

The Sussex survived the war despite being hit by a Kamikaze in July 1945. She was scrapped in 1950

**Monday 28th June**CLOCKS ON ½ HR at 2400 hrs

Almost flat calm now. Cruiser "Suffolk" [Sussex] left us at 1430 hrs & headed north at high speed. Now escorted by Flotilla Leader "VAN TROMP" (Dutch).

Most peculiar looking vessel. Very heavily gunned & has a great reputation. I seem to be the most energetic one in our cabin — Always first up & shaved. Air still very stuffy in cabin at night. Cold winds prevailing now. Fine, clear night.

**Tuesday 29th June**CLOCK ON ½ HR.

Sunrise 0730 hrs — Beautiful sights. Sunsets [sic] are beyond my powers of description. Sea as calm as proverbial millpond but there must be heavy ground swell [judging] by rolling of ship. Escort very close in at sunrise.

Whales very much in evidence all day. Shoals of Flying Fish around us all day also. Speed reduced today. Sea calm but heavy swell. To bed early with cold. Wore battledress for first time.

**Wednesday 30th June**CLOCKS ON ½ HR.

Down with Flu. Feeling very miserable & stuffed up. Very chilly this morning. Wore B [Battle] Dress jacket.

Course due E. Speed about 10 Knots. Reported to MO & was given Pills. 4 Aspros & 2 [unreadable] Pills every 4 hours. To bed all afternoon & had good sleep.

Bed again early after dinner.

**JULY****Thursday 1st July**

Sea calm but very heavy ground swell.

Off West Aussie coast in morning & many "Hudson" planes patrolling.

*Started to enter "Swan" River at 1300 hrs & berthed by 1430 after much difficulty owing to troops crowding to side of ship & causing heavy list to stbd [starboard].*

*Raining all day but intermittently. Leave granted till sailing time — 0730 hrs Sat. Dined on board. Clyde Williams & self for walk on Shore.*

*Bed early.*

*Very cold now.*

### **Friday 2nd July**

*Board of Enquiry adjourned.*

*Clyde & Self to Perth by Bus. Shopping in morning. Lunch at Western Officers Club. Butcher & I to Court Hotel & met Clarry O'Brien. I spoke to Stan O'Brien over the phone. Back to Town & shopped & dinner in some Café. To ship by train.*

*Bed early.*

### **Saturday 3rd July**

*Left Freemantle sharp at 0730. Escort — 2 Dutch Corvettes. Headed NW.*

*Wind & Rain very cold & very heavy sea rising — Ship pitching & not at all comfortable.*

*Ports closed all day.*

*Feeling ill with Flu & in bed most of day.*

### **Sunday 4th July**

*Clocks on ½ HR at 2400 hrs.*

*Seas very high — Coarse now ESE. Colder than ever now. Stopped in cabin & in bed most of day. Was able to get at Bed Roll in hold today, so now have woollies & am a lot warmer. Cold bad, but I think on the mend. Completed Customs declaration this afternoon.*

Customs Declaration [in back of diary]

4-7-43

*Stockings — 12-0*

*Lingerie — 1-10-0*

*Wooden Souvenirs — 14-6*

Toilet Articles — 1-4-6

Cottons & Elastics — 7-6

### **Monday 5th July**

Clocks on ½ hr.

Member of Court of Enquiry re. losses of clothing & Equipment.

Sitting all day.

Sea much steadier but much heavy rain & temperature very low. Seas coming in porthole so cabin closed up.

Drew Rail Warrant, Ration Cards & Clothing Coupons today.

### **Tuesday 6th July**

Clocks on ½ hr.

Court of Enquiry concluded today — Seas moderate but wind very cold & biting.

Sun shining for first time in many days — very “quais”<sup>336</sup> when out of wind.

To Kiwi Concert Party concert in No 1 Mess at 2000 hrs.

### **Wednesday 7th July**

Clocks on ½ hr.

Course Due E & sea calm. Light winds but very cold.

Easy day.

Drinks with Brig. Kippenberger at 1800 hrs.

Bed early but unable to sleep.

### **Thursday 8th July**

HOBART on R. DERWENT. [Tasmania]

CLOCKS ON ½ HR.

Still awake at 0500 hrs. Slept for 1 hr. Shave & shower at 0600.

Blackout off 0710. Submarine sighted at 0708. Depth charges dropped & all Action Stations manned. Ship worked up to 27 Knots — Breakfast 2 hrs late. Resumed course & tied up at 0930. Very fine but cold day.

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<sup>336</sup> “Good” in Arabic

*Mt. behind town snow capped. Fine & Sunny today. Left Hobart at 1530 on last lap of Homeward journey. Travelling at High speed till well away from River Derwent.*

**Friday 9th July**

CLOCKS ON ½ HR.

*Pay Day. Officers £10.*

*ORs £5*

*Sea good. Light winds. Sunny day but cold.*

*Lazy day all day.*

*Nothing to note all day bar Pay Parade.*

**Saturday 10th July**

CLOCKS ON ½ HR.

*AT LAST! NZ TIME AGAIN*

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*Making good progress all day. Light winds, Sunny but cold. Strong swell, increasing as day passes. Ship rolling all day but very much from about [1700?] hrs. Heeling to Starboard but not to Port. Slowly rounding Stewart Island & striking currents from Foveaux Strait.*

*Many "Happy" people in Lounge & Mess tonight. What Ho! for tomorrow night.*

*Course ESE till about 2000 hours. Then due East all night.*

**Sunday 11th July**

CLOCKS ON ½ Hour.

*Enzed In Sight.*

*First glimpse of Homeland after 3 yrs at 0710 hrs. Course due East & Stewart Island visible to Port at approx. 20 miles. Great Excitement.*

*News of Invasion of Sicily.*

*Heavy Fog at 1100 hrs. Slowed down & Siren blowing.*

*Fog on & off till 1500 hrs. Then clear & Alps in sight till nightfall. Bright clear moonlight [sic] night. Steaming North slowly.*

*Last night aboard & very noisy with many minor celebrations all over ship.*



**Monday 12th July**

*Up at 0550. Breakfast 0715 hrs. Raining & cold. Pilot aboard 0730. Entered Wgton [Wellington] heads at 0855. Passed through Boom at 0855 — Massey Memorial at 0900. Berthing difficulties owing to troops on one side. Tied up by 1030 hrs.*

*Troops going off (Figure 71). Wet & miserable day. Paraded at 2130 & entrained at 2300 hrs.*

*Special dispensation from Col. Bill Inness — Allowed ashore to meet Doy.*



**Figure 71**

The first furlough draft of 2NZEF disembarking in Wellington on the 12th July, 1943 (photo: unknown official photographer)



**Figure 72**

The German war cemetery of La Mornaghia, Tunisia, in the 1960s, “concentrated” by the VDK to Bordj Cedria around 1974 (photo: unknown German photographer)

## POST MORTEM

### NORTH AFRICA'S WW2 MILITARY CEMETERIES POST WAR

Wally von Schramm died in 1980. Had they not died in the desert, most of those whose identities he and his unit registered would now be dead as well. But the campaign's cemeteries remain, UK and Dominion (Commonwealth), French, German, Italian, US, from one end of the North African littoral to other, and—if the hopes of their creators are realised—they will continue to do so *in perpetuity*. Today no doubt they are still visited by a handful of relatives, people with a direct personal connection to the campaign and for whom they are places of contemplation, but soon, when that personal connection has ceased to exist, the vast majority of visitors will be tourists, drawn by the kind of curiosity and awe that draws visitors to other, much older cemeteries and memorials to the dead. They will continue to provide a link to the past but the nature of the link, and the perception and importance of that past will be very different.<sup>337</sup>

Assuming, that is, they still exist at all.

Inevitably, the alienation of useful land for war cemeteries has been controversial. In 1972, in order to accommodate urban expansion, but also certainly for political reasons, Italy was obliged by the revolutionary Government of Muammar Gaddafi to remove 20,000-odd military dead from Tripoli's Italian Military Cemetery,<sup>338</sup> and smaller UK and Dominion cemeteries have had to be moved within Greece and within Indonesia—also at the insistence of their host countries.<sup>339</sup> Even in France where the idea of a “*sepulture perpetuelle*” was first enshrined in land-grants by its government for war cemeteries, and where the war cemetery relates to its own history and has become an integral part of its cultural landscape, there was resistance to it.<sup>340</sup> Ongoing threats to war cemeteries worldwide come from neglect, often the consequence of an inhospitable political environment in the host country; socially and politically motivated vandalism;<sup>341</sup> the environment; and from

“over-riding public necessity” (for airfields, new graves, reservoirs, roads, urban development), a loophole written into an “additional protocol” of the 1949 Geneva Convention covering grounds for the exhumation of war dead.<sup>342</sup> One cannot even be confident of an ongoing commitment from all those currently tasked with their maintenance. For example, when Pakistan left the Commonwealth, it also withdrew from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), despite the fact that many of the dead memorialised were Muslim southeast Asians from territories that lie within the actual and claimed boundaries of modern Pakistan.<sup>343</sup> The future of these cemeteries therefore is by no means certain.

Meanwhile, owing to their locations outdoors, they need constant maintenance. Gardens need to be tended and watered; gravestones to be cleaned and (occasionally) replaced; and associated infrastructure repaired. In theory they are also regularly visited by management and supervisory staff. All of this takes money—for the CWGC in Egypt, for example, c. £600,000 annually. Its cemetery at El Alamein (**Figure 73**), to which many of the dead curated by Wally and his unit were removed, employs four permanent staff; and in 2019/20, the roof of the memorial there was re-waterproofed,<sup>344</sup> and the cemetery’s 1950s drainage channels and pump room restored.<sup>345</sup> For a cemetery of its size (by area, the El Alamein cemetery is one of the CWGC’s largest), this may not seem so much, but *in perpetuity* and extrapolated across the vast number of war cemeteries at home

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<sup>337</sup> cf. Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998

<sup>338</sup> Formiconi, 2021, p. 165; New York Times, 1972, 5 June, p. 36

<sup>339</sup> IWGC, 1957, pp. 7–8; CWGC, 2023b

<sup>340</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], pp. 11–13

<sup>341</sup> e.g. during the post-Gaddafi Libyan civil war when UK and Dominion Forces gravestones in Benghazi were deliberately smashed by members of an Islamist militia (Al Jazeera, 2012). These graves have since been repaired (Quinn, 2023)

<sup>342</sup> Gibson and Ward, 1989, pp. 83–84; Hayes, 2002; Petrig, 2009, pp. 360–61; Rudgard, 2017

<sup>343</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 241

<sup>344</sup> The Complete Roofing Company, 2020

<sup>345</sup> CWGC, 2021, p. 22; Quinn, 2023

and abroad managed by the war graves authorities of the former combatant nations,<sup>346</sup> it is a phenomenal investment, and yet one with a changing and very likely diminishing return to society over time. Can anyone but the most idealistic expect it be sustained? Of course not. Yet open discussion of this issue is taboo; and—in theory at least—the honoured dead remain forever inviolable.

### *Aftermath*

In July 1943, only two months after the end of the North African campaign, the then Imperial War Graves Commission's (IWGC) newly appointed Principal Architect for Egypt and North Africa, Hubert Worthington, flew to the region with a brief to select 10 or fewer new permanent cemetery sites for the campaign's UK and Dominion Forces dead. These were to be readily accessible to future visitors and contain 2000 or more burials, big enough to benefit from economies of scale, but also, as Worthington wrote of the site at Sollum-Halfaya, possessed of "beauty of natural setting, and the irresistible appeal of a historic battleground".<sup>347</sup> In fact, 19 were chosen.<sup>348</sup> At this point, the job of graves registration was far from over, and that of concentrating graves into permanent cemeteries hardly begun, and it would be years before the Commission could begin its work of

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<sup>346</sup> The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC)—26 war cemeteries (ABMC, n.d); the Italian *Commissariato generale per le onoranze ai caduti in guerra* (*Onorcaduti*)—eight *Sacrari Militari* and 1300 other burial grounds; the CWGC—2500 war cemeteries and cemetery plots as well as numerous individual grave sites (CWGC, 2008; Gibson and Ward, 1986, p. 63); the French *Ministère des Armées*—more than 3400 burial sites, including 275 national cemeteries (*Ministère des Armées*, n.d a); the German *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*—832 war cemeteries (VDK, 2019, p. 7)

<sup>347</sup> Higginson, 1944a, p. 1; Longworth, 1985 [2010], pp. 178–179; Spark, 2009, p. 243–45; Worthington, 1943a, p. 10

<sup>348</sup> El Alamein, Halfaya-Sollum, Geneifa (Feyid) and Heliopolis in Egypt; Barce or Regima (later swapped for Benghazi), Knightsbridge-Acroma, Tobruk and Tripoli in Libya; Beja, Enfidaville, Mareth, Massicault, Medjez-el-Bab, Oued Zarga, Sfax, Tabarka and Thibar Seminary in Tunisia, and Bone and Dely Ibrahim in Algeria (Worthington, 1943, 2; 1943b, pp. 1–2)

monumentalisation on the ground. But the tiny numbers of Graves Registration Units (GRUs) in operation during the early stages of the war in the desert<sup>349</sup> were at last being augmented, and by the end of 1943 there were 10 GRUs and three Graves Concentration Units (GCUs) operating in the region,<sup>350</sup> which in cooperation with



**Figure 73**  
El Alamein today  
(photo: Philip  
Hassan)

each other and increasingly assisted (officially, “diluted”) by Italian POWs, were reported to be making progress in both registering and concentrating the campaign’s graves.<sup>351</sup> The NZGREU, now under the command of Harry Overton, had meanwhile been transferred from the Western Desert to the Levant.

Progress overall was slow, however, and for a variety of reasons. Planning for El Alamein was put on hold when the Australian Army decided to concentrate its own graves *within* it.<sup>352</sup> At Barce, a designated concentration cemetery had to be abandoned when it was found to be waterlogged, and the dead already buried there moved. Likewise an early concentration cemetery established at Amiriya was closed.<sup>353</sup> There were endless bureaucratic and financial to-and-froings.<sup>354</sup> Meanwhile outstanding individual graves, because their locations had been lost or because these were in or hedged around by minefields, were becoming increasingly difficult to find and recover.<sup>355</sup> Indeed graves and bodies would continue to be recovered from the Western Desert and Tunisia long after UK and Dominion Forces had given up on them.<sup>356</sup>

Predictably the first cemeteries (and cemetery plots) taken over by the IWGC were in metropolitan Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>357</sup> Most were relatively small, and because these areas had not seen the see-sawing that had characterised the campaign in the Western Desert, the logistics of graves concentration into them was simpler. By the end of 1945, however, registration and concentration across the theatre as a whole was reported to be complete and the majority of cemeteries

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<sup>349</sup> 5 GRU, 1 and 2 SA GRU, the NZGREU and, briefly, 1 Aus GRU

<sup>350</sup> 21 GRU, and 10 and 25 GCU and 4 (SA) GCU in Egypt; 20, 22, 27 and 28 GRU in Cyrenaica; 24 GRU in Tripolitania; 5, 17 and 23 GRU in Tunisia; and 8 GRU in Algeria (Dixon *et al.*, 1943)

<sup>351</sup> Dixon *et al.*, 1943

<sup>352</sup> 20 War Graves Unit, 1945; Higginson, 1945; Peek, 1945; Worthington, 1945

<sup>353</sup> The movement of graves from Barce is nowhere mentioned but the CWGC's Benghazi page refers to a memorial to "casualties buried in Barce War Cemetery, whose graves could not be located", while a letter from F. Higginson to H. Worthington acknowledges receipt of a concentration plan for the cemetery (1944b). That it was liable to flooding is mentioned in Worthington's original description of the site (1943a, p. 13) and in an early 1944 report on the site by the AAG, Col. S. Fraser (Higginson, 1944a, p. 1–2). For Amiriya, see this volume, p. 223

<sup>354</sup> Longworth, 1985 [210], pp. 180–81

<sup>355</sup> Fraser, 1944a; Spark, 2009, pp. 116–17. See also Wally's diary for 1943

<sup>356</sup> e.g. Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, pp. 273, 275; IWGC, 1950, p. 31; VDK, 1961, p. 6

<sup>357</sup> IWGC, 1945, p. 16; 1946a, pp. 19, 26



had been taken over, and in June the following year the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries in the Middle East (by that date subsumed under Central Mediterranean Graves Registration and Enquiries) officially ceased operations.<sup>358</sup> Actual construction work on the first new cemetery in the region, Sollum-Halfaya, began in 1946 and was finished, bar the headstones, by early 1948,<sup>359</sup> five years after the end of the campaign. It was followed by Knightsbridge-Acroma (1949), Tobruk, Benghazi and Heliopolis (1951), El Alamein (1954), Massicault (1955), Enfidaville (1955/56), Medjez-el-Bab (1957) etc.<sup>360</sup> Read through its records from this period, and the IWGC comes over as a complacent talking-shop, but it had not in fact been idle, and prior to this final construction phase had assessed a range of plans, from sketches to final working-drawings produced by its architects, had researched materials, discussed headstones, and had written costings, tenders and contracts for the numerous cemeteries that were to become its responsibility in North Africa (and elsewhere), all of which enabled the job of construction in the field.

After a shaky start in the region,<sup>361</sup> the US settled upon a system similar to that of the UK and Dominions, whereby the US Graves Registration Service recorded and either repatriated (an imperative peculiar to the US and France) (**Figure 74**) or, in consultation with the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), concentrated the dead in an agreed permanent cemetery, before handing this over to the ABMC for architectural embellishment and long-term care.<sup>362</sup> None of the temporary US cemeteries in the region (18 in all)<sup>363</sup> were

<sup>358</sup> IWGC, 1946b, p. 3; 1947, p. 22; Sparks, 2009, pp. 127, 136

<sup>359</sup> IWGC, 1948, p. 13; 1949, p. 27; 1952, pp. 33–34. The IWGC records for progress on, and completion dates of, cemeteries in the region are ambiguous, and it is very difficult to establish when exactly individual cemeteries were in fact completed

<sup>360</sup> IWGC, 1950, pp. 9, 30; 1952, pp. 15, 43–44; 1955a, p. 45; 1955b, pp. 34, 54; 1958, pp. 64–65, 74

<sup>361</sup> Steere, 1951, pp. 54–60

<sup>362</sup> ABMC, 1960, pp. 14, 16–17





**Figure 74**

USAAF graves and a SAAF grave at Kilo 151 Cemetery, Alam el Mireibet. None of the US airmen are listed amongst those buried in the US Military Cemetery at Carthage so presumably their remains were repatriated (photo: Lloyd Rodgers)

deemed suitable for a permanent cemetery and instead, in 1948, a new cemetery at Carthage was established, into which 39 per cent of US burials originally made in North Africa<sup>364</sup> and elsewhere in the Middle East were concentrated. Construction of the Carthage cemetery was completed in 1960.<sup>365</sup> Ongoing active official interest in the cemetery and its dead, however, was demonstrated as recently as 2022, when a memorandum of understanding was signed between the US and Tunisia, which will allow the US to exhume and repatriate for identification an unspecified number of the cemetery's unidentified dead.<sup>366</sup>

<sup>363</sup> Steere, 1951, pp. 50, 52, 60 (Four in Morocco, three in Algeria and 11 in Tunisia)

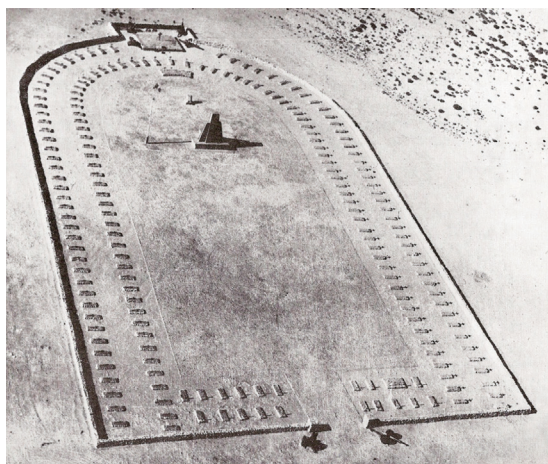
<sup>364</sup> There were US plots in both Libya (Benghazi) and Egypt (at Alam el Mireibet) (Peek, 1944; Schramm, this volume, p. 226)

<sup>365</sup> ABMC, 1960, pp. 4, 14

<sup>366</sup> Liebermann, 2022

France's dead from the North African campaign were buried in both UK and Dominion cemeteries (notably El Alamein), and in designated French cemeteries. For the Free French, the principal architect of the latter was Wally's reckless French colleague, Colonel Mallet, who early on established "permanent" cemeteries on the battlefield at Bir Hakeim (1943) (Figure 75), and at Takrouna in Tunisia.<sup>367</sup> Owing to its out of the way position, however, the cemetery at Bir Hakeim was soon deemed unviable and in 1952 was removed to Tobruk where the battle's dead were reburied alongside a handful of Free French soldiers killed thereabouts earlier during the campaign. These were joined 12 years later by the Free French dead from Kufra Oasis.<sup>368</sup> Tobruk thus became the sole designated French war cemetery in Libya. Later, the French war cemetery at Gammarth, first established in 1944, became the main French military/war cemetery in Tunisia, when between 1965 and 1971, French military dead from WW2 and other periods, formerly interred in 14 Tunisian cemeteries, were concentrated there.<sup>369</sup> Gammarth was the last allied war cemetery in North Africa to be completed.

The imperatives and issues that applied to the campaign's allied dead, applied to its German and Italian dead as well—except that



**Figure 75**  
The Free French  
cemetery at Bir  
Hakeim (photo:  
unknown)



**Figure 76**

South African personnel the German cemetery at Mersa Matruh (photo: Arthur Gleadall)

neither the Germans nor the Italians retained control of the battlefield (**Figure 76**) and until the conclusion of the war their dead became the responsibility allied forces operating in the region. UK War Office and DGRE protocols regarding enemy dead were explicit: they were to be treated in the same way as allied dead but concentrated “in special enemy plots...”, not side by side with allied troops and “never, never [...] in the same grave as an allied soldier”,<sup>370</sup> and this is what happened. At El Alamein, they were concentrated on Hill 33, including those originally located in the UK and Dominion cemetery there (**Figure 13, right**),<sup>371</sup> in the Acroma area, at El Mrassas,<sup>372</sup> and

<sup>367</sup> FFL, 2011

<sup>368</sup> Ministère des Armées, n.d c; Pallud, 2012, p. 559

<sup>369</sup> Ministère des Armées, n.d b

<sup>370</sup> DGRE, 1944, section XIII; War Office, 1939, pp. 48, 118

<sup>371</sup> Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, pp. 260, 267–268; Dixon *et al.*, 1943

so on. With the closing down of Central Mediterranean Graves Registration and Enquiries operations in the Middle East, however, they were effectively abandoned. What happened next was up to the Germans and Italians, and the host countries.

The curation of the campaign's German and Italian dead post war followed a trajectory similar to that of its UK and Dominion dead, only later. In 1948, Italy's *Commissariato Generale per le Oneranze ai Caduti in Guerra* (the *Onorcaduti*) assumed responsibility for Italian and German cemeteries in Egypt and recommenced the recovery and concentration of the dead from minor cemeteries and the battlefield. With the establishment of the German Federal Republic, a *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* agent was appointed for the region,<sup>373</sup> and between 1951 and 1953, a *Volksbund* team in Libya concentrated 5350 German dead at Tobruk (at the same time recovering 187 allied and 100 Italian dead),<sup>374</sup> before transferring to Egypt, where up to February 1954, the combined missions were responsible for the recovery and concentration of over 3281 German and Italian dead (and the recovery of additional allied dead).<sup>375</sup> During these concentrations, the identities of many Germans and Italians that had gone astray, owing to the incomplete information stamped on German dog-tags,<sup>376</sup> and a misunderstanding of Italian names by UK and Dominion troops,<sup>377</sup> were recovered. Ultimately the campaign's German dead were concentrated into five "permanent" cemeteries across the region, Tobruk (1955), El Alamein (1959), then, after considerable delays obtaining the necessary agreements from their host nations, Bordj Cedria in Tunisia (1977), Ben M'Sik in Morocco (late 70s), and Dely-Ibrahim in Algeria (1986), while the campaign's Italian dead were concentrated at El Alamein (1959), where they remain, and Tripoli (1955–58) and four cemeteries in Tunisia, from which they were later removed to Bari's *Sacrario dei Caduti d'Oltremare* (in 1962–63 and 1972).<sup>37</sup>

***"Their name liveth for evermore"—the ideal of perpetuity***

For the 20th-century, the commitment of the state to maintain these cemeteries in perpetuity was summed-up by Winston Churchill in

a 1920 British House of Commons debate on the IWGC, “The cemeteries...” he said, “will be supported and sustained by the wealth of this great nation and Empire, as long as we remain a nation and an Empire, and there is no reason at all why, in periods as remote from our own as we ourselves are from the Tudors, the graveyards in France of this Great War, shall not remain an abiding and supreme memorial to the efforts and the glory of the British Army, and the sacrifices made in the great cause [WWI]”.<sup>379</sup> The commitment is restated explicitly in the recent literature of several of the former combatants.<sup>380</sup>

Its origins lie in the middle of the 19th-century, prior to which war dead tended either to be abandoned in the field or buried in mass, usually unmarked graves.<sup>381</sup> What prompted it exactly is uncertain,

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<sup>372</sup> 21 Graves Registration Unit, 1944

<sup>373</sup> Ottokar Pauer 1950 (Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, p. 273)

<sup>374</sup> VDK, 1961, p. 6; n.d, p. 12

<sup>375</sup> Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, pp. 275–76

<sup>376</sup> McGuirk, 1987, p. 71

<sup>377</sup> Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, pp. 267–68

<sup>378</sup> Formiconi, 2021, pp. 165–66. In addition to Hill 33 (Tel el Eisa) at El Alamein, Caccia-Dominioni, refers to 14 cemeteries in Egypt “left in perfect condition” by Italians seconded to 25 GCU (1966, pp. 265, 269). Specific sites in that country mentioned as “concentration cemeteries” include Matruh Axis (Dixon *et al.*, 1943) and Tel el Eisa. In Libya they include Bardia (Dixon *et al.*, 1943), Derna (IWGC, 1943, p. 9), el Mrassas and Tobruk (Caccia-Dominioni, 1966, p. 274), from which the Italian dead were later removed to Tripoli. Other identifiable axis cemeteries and plots in the region are of course known, but not certainly used by the allies for the concentration/reburial of German and Italian dead. These included, in the El Alamein area, Abd el Rahman, Deir el Harra, and Wally’s Qattara Road and MR 8609 2587 cemeteries (see also **Appx 5**); and elsewhere in Egypt, Amiriya, El Tahag (on the Suez Canal), Geneifa, and Moascar; and in Libya, Capuzzo (2 cemeteries), Halfaya Pass, and the Tobruk Roadhouse hospital (Caccia-Dominioni, 1966; Conte, 2012, p. 74; this volume, pp. 255, 265). “Temporary” German cemeteries in Tunisia later concentrated into Bordj Cedria included Nassen (Cap Bon), Bizerta, La Mornaghia, El M’Dou, Mateur and Sfax (VDK, n.d). Temporary Italian cemeteries in Tunisia included Chebedda, Bizerta, Tebouldou and Sidi el Hani (Formiconi, 2021, p. 166)

<sup>379</sup> Churchill, 1920

<sup>380</sup> ABMC, n.d; CWGC, 2021, pp. 4–5, 38; Ministère des Armées, n.d a

but very likely it results from the coming together of three factors: the inclusion amongst the dead of large numbers of volunteers and (later) conscripts, who were of a higher status than professional soldiers, and therefore deemed worthy of both record and reverent burial;<sup>382</sup> the fighting of wars at home and the prompt reporting of distant conflicts, so that those who died in them were neither out of sight nor of mind; and a perceived need to assert a political identity, in this case through the segregation and appropriation of particular war dead.<sup>383</sup> In the US, during and after its civil war, the result was a series of incremental laws and appropriations which first established National Cemeteries for Union war dead (1862),<sup>384</sup> then enclosed and provided gravestones for these (1867, 1873),<sup>385</sup> and finally made similar provision for the dead of the Confederacy (1906, 1929).<sup>386</sup> For mainland Europe, it was a clause in the Treaty of Frankfurt (1871), between France and Prussia, which provided for the maintenance of each other's war graves on each other's territories, and then in 1915, the passing of the "*sepulture perpetuelle*" law in France, which provided both for the individual burial of soldiers and the maintenance of their graves by the State in perpetuity.<sup>387</sup> For the UK, whose wars continued to be fought out of sight, it was a proper, if retrospective, record of the dead of the second Boer War (1901–04).<sup>388</sup> The long-term maintenance of the military cemeteries and monuments established was implicit. Thus by the time the ABMC, the IWGC, the *Onorcaduti* and the *Volksbund* were established in the 20th-century, the principal of perpetuity was set in stone.

That said, the curation of the dead continued to be pragmatic. Naval dead continued to be buried at sea. UK and Dominion and

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<sup>381</sup> Mosse, 1990, p. 45

<sup>382</sup> Mosse, 1990, pp. 9–10, 17–18

<sup>383</sup> e.g. Grant, 2005; Mosse, 1990, p. 19

<sup>384</sup> Steere, 1953a

<sup>385</sup> Steere, 1953a; 1953b

<sup>386</sup> Mollan, 2003

<sup>387</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 11–12; Ministère des Armées, n.d a

<sup>388</sup> Chadwick, 1981, p. 33

German dead were denied repatriation. Army and air force dead were systematically concentrated and individual cemeteries were prioritised over others—primarily for financial reasons. Individual graves and even small cemeteries considered irrecoverable<sup>389</sup> or (later) unmaintainable were abandoned and the names of the men buried in them inscribed elsewhere. Impermanent accommodations were made between combatant, and cemetery host nations.<sup>390</sup> There has been, therefore, and no doubt there will continue to be retrenchment from the ideal of perpetuity.

### Architecture

The architecture of WW2's permanent war cemeteries, including those in North Africa, was conditioned by three things: cost, the physical environment and a national or institutional architectural vision, pre-existing and unchallenged in the case of the allies,<sup>391</sup> and challenged and evolving in the case of the Germans and Italians.

For UK and Dominion cemeteries, it was agreed early on that formulae established for cemetery design after WWI would be retained.<sup>392</sup> It is not perhaps surprising therefore that the Principal Architect chosen by the IWGC for Egypt and North Africa, Hubert Worthington, was a WWI veteran, and former associate of Edwin Luytens, himself an IWGC Principal Architect and designer of the Commission's altar-like Stone of Remembrance, the Cenotaph, and the Thiepval Memorial. Worthington's North African cemeteries, like most IWGC cemeteries, are dominated by the Stone of Remembrance, the Cross of Sacrifice, on which is mounted an inverted "Crusader" sword, and—above all—the many ranks of near identical, non-sectarian IWGC gravestones fashioned from Portland Stone (**Figures 73 and 77–79**). Their locations, their

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<sup>389</sup> Latter, 1944

<sup>390</sup> The land on which the *Sacrario Militare di El Alamein* is located was leased for 99 years only (Formiconi, 2021, p. 158)

<sup>391</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2020], pp. 178–179; Worthington, 1943, p. 3

<sup>392</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 163





**Figures 77 and 78**  
CWGC cemeteries at El Alamein (1984) and Knightsbridge-Acroma (1963)



high walls, intended to keep out the desert sands (**Figure 78**), and their horticultural design (**Figure 73**), which—in the desert at least—was of necessity quite distinct, stand out. (By contrast, the Medjez-el-Bab cemetery in temperate northern Tunisia does not). But they remain pre-eminently IWGC, pre-eminently British, and the new architecture, though not without merit, at best a tinkering around the edges of a pre-existing earlier 20th-century conception.



**Figure 79**

Queen Elizabeth II with Prince Phillip laying a wreath at the Tobruk Stone of Remembrance (1954) (photo: unknown)

It was not of course IWGC cemeteries only that projected a national identity. Those of all the combatant nations did. The dead, who had formerly lain side-by-side, were claimed as national property and clearly distinguished.

Like IWGC cemeteries, both the French and US reused nationally distinct WWI gravestone materials (concrete and marble, respectively) and—in their cases, varying sectarian—gravestone

designs.<sup>393</sup> Additionally, in French cemeteries in Tunisia, including that of the Free French at Takrouna, graves were embellished with French Army Adrian helmets (not the British Mk II helmet actually worn by Free French troops in the region), while the graves in all three French North African cemeteries were surrounded by neat curbs, a feature also employed in WW2 French cemeteries in



**Figure 80**

The Free French cemetery at Takrouna (2010) (photo: US Army)

Italy (**Figure 80**). The design for the ABMC's Carthage cemetery included features such as a non-sectarian chapel, a visitor reception area and battle maps, different in design from those in other US military cemeteries, but paralleling them nonetheless.<sup>394</sup> It is also evident from its use of expensive, non-local materials that money was no object, something which cannot be said of either its UK and Dominion or French counterparts.

Germany's North African war cemeteries are characterised by their depersonalisation of the dead, which contrasts starkly with both

allied forms, and *Wehrmacht* practice in the field, which insisted upon, and often involved the construction of highly elaborate, individual graves (**Figure 76**),<sup>395</sup> by the widespread use in them of rusticated stone, and by their stylised imagery and blending of German national and—in its North African cemeteries—local/regional motifs.

These features are exemplified in the Tobruk and El Alamein *Totenburgen* (**Figures 81 and 82**), bold castle-like mausolea of Third Reich rather than WWI antecedence, designed by Robert Tischler, the *Volksbund*'s chief architect throughout the period of the Third Reich,<sup>396</sup> which were justified by the post-war *Volksbund* on the grounds of the threat posed to unenclosed graves by the desert environment.<sup>397</sup> The Tobruk mausoleum, though interpreted as Hohenstaufen in inspiration (Kappel, 2017),<sup>398</sup> recalls extant Ottoman Forts in the region,<sup>399</sup> and incorporates stone (basalt) brought from Germany, while the El Alamein mausoleum, which is explicitly modelled on Castel del Monte, Frederick II Hohenstaufen's hunting lodge on the Mergè plateau in Apulia, incorporates such features as an Arab portal, Byzanto-Coptic mosaics, Germanic eagles and an Egyptian obelisk, also in German basalt (**Figures 83 and 84**).<sup>400</sup>

By the 1970s, *Totenburgen* had fallen out of favour,<sup>401</sup> and in Tunisia's Bordj Cedria, we see something different. Its architect, Dieter Oesterlen attempted to reconcile the supposed need for crypt burial with the open architectural space of his rather better North Italian Futa Pass cemetery, producing a series of open but tamer,

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<sup>393</sup> ABMC, 1960, p. 18; Biraben, 2018

<sup>394</sup> ABMC, 1960, pp. 7–12, 18

<sup>395</sup> Janz, 2017; McGuirk, 1987, p. 71

<sup>396</sup> Tischler, a party member, was responsible for similar *Totenburgen* in immediately pre-war Italy (Pordoi, Quero), Silesia (the Annaberg, Waldenburg/Wałbrzych) and Yugoslavia (Bitola)

<sup>397</sup> VDK, 1961, p. 7

<sup>398</sup> Kappel (2017) suggests Castello Maniace in Syracuse and Castello Ursino in Catania

<sup>399</sup> e.g. Apollonia, Mjazem, Qasr Libya, etc.

<sup>400</sup> VDK, 1961, pp. 35–43

<sup>401</sup> Urmson, 2017



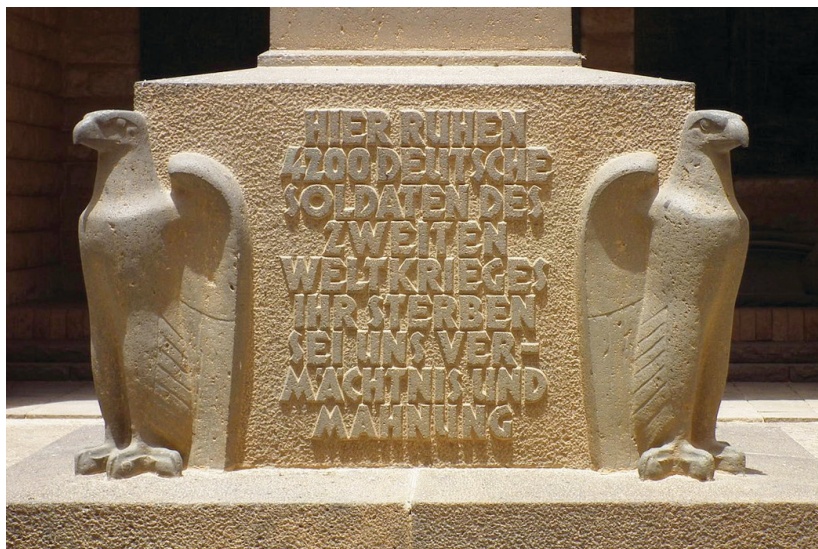
**Figures 81 and 82**

The Tobruk and El Alamein *Totenburgen* (photos: VDK, 1961, and Philip Hassan)





Figure 83  
 “Byzanto-Coptic” mosaic in the El Alamein *Totenburg* (photo: Philip Hassan)



**Figure 84**

Germanic eagles (?referencing Horus) at the base of a basalt pyramid in the centre of the El Alamein *Totenburg* (photo: Philip Hassan)

more intimate spaces. However, Bordj Cedria too depersonalised the dead, enclosing them in monolithic, granite-clad ossuaries, and in it once again we see the juxtaposition of local and non-local stone, stone typical of WW2 German war cemeteries internationally, and embellishments including a map of former German war cemeteries fashioned from local tiles.<sup>402</sup>

Finally, the Italian ossuary or *Sacrario* at El Alamein by Paolo Caccia-Dominioni,<sup>403</sup> dominated by an octagonal tower, is Italian fascist in its use of the tower motif and domestic Italian in the design of its individual burial niches (**Figures 85 and 86**),<sup>404</sup> while the architect's use of arches at El Alamein and in the Tripoli concentration cemetery was inescapably late Italian Colonial Modern.<sup>405</sup>

### ***Intended And Unintended Meanings***

These cemeteries and the architectural vision manifest in them were



**Figure 85**

The Italian *Sacrario di El Alamein* (2023) (photo: Philip Hassan)

the product of four quite different things: wartime psychological manipulation—the obfuscation of the reality of war and the “proper” treatment of the dead being perceived as good for morale at home and in the field; sentiment, a perceived need in the survivors for what we would today call “closure”;<sup>406</sup> an aspiration to promote national identity and (varying) national ideals;<sup>407</sup> and logistics and economy, it being easier and cheaper in the short term to bury the dead in concentration cemeteries in or near the battlefield than to bring them home. Except historically, of these, only the third retains much

<sup>402</sup> Bonkat, 2015; VDK, 2009, 18

<sup>403</sup> Conte, 2012; Ministero della Difesa, 2015

<sup>404</sup> cf. *Sacrari Militari* at Montello (Nervesa della Bataglia), Monte Pasubio, Oslavia, Pocol and Rovereto

<sup>405</sup> Formiconi, 2021, pp. 160–61, 165; e.g. Fuller, 2007 [2010], chapter 5

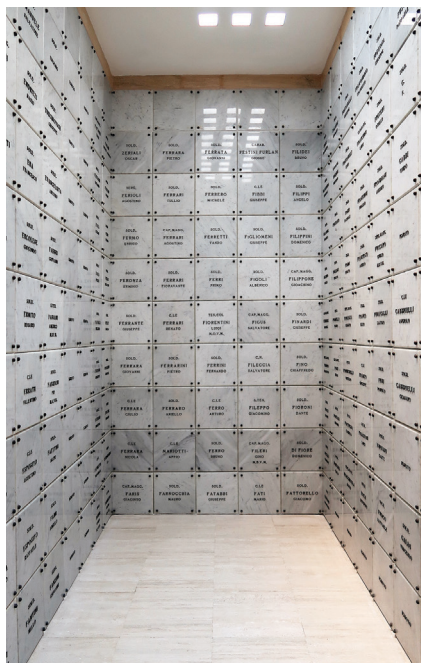
<sup>406</sup> e.g. Kenyon, 1918

<sup>407</sup> Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 28; Mosse, 1990



relevance, and for most of us, even this is fading. But the cemeteries of all the combatant nations continue to be meaningful, in both positive and negative, and intended and unintended ways.

The war cemetery, like the battlefield itself, and the surviving portable material culture of war, provides a point of psychological contact between the past and the present.<sup>408</sup> Coming upon, walking amongst the graves of the war dead, predominantly young men shot,



**Figure 86**  
Individual burial niches in the  
*Sacrario di El Alamein* (photo:  
Philip Hassan)

blown to pieces and burnt to death because of a failure of politics and society, is a potent experience. Perhaps a 100,000 men—UK and Dominion, Czech, French, German, Italian, Libyan, Polish, US—died during the North African campaign,<sup>409</sup> not many perhaps compared to the numbers of those who died on the Western Front during WWI, but a huge number nonetheless; and the cemeteries in which they lie are central to realising and understanding the human implications of



that campaign. Irrespective of their appearance, they are not polite English churchyards or medieval castles, they are war cemeteries, and those who lie in them—the majority disinterested innocents—were obliged to serve and deliberately killed. Your grandfather, my father's best friend (most of those who died had no descendants), someone's husband, someone's child, someone's brother. The graves of these men (and occasionally women), tragic 80 years ago, now provide a stark warning of humanity's potential for self-destruction. They are moreover part of the Western World's cultural heritage in the Mediterranean.

They are also now themselves historical relics, and some—if not all—have intrinsic artistic and architectural merit. A politically neutral architectural historian would regret the destruction of the *Totenburgen* no less than, for example, that of some of the better examples of neighbouring Libya's Italian Colonial Modern. But they are not themselves politically neutral—not as architecture, nor as war cemeteries.

Most overtly contentious are Tischler's *Totenburgen*. As well as being Adolf Hitler's preferred burial place for Germany's war dead, for many, *Totenburgen* remain too suggestive of National Socialist ideals for comfort,<sup>408</sup> while—in North Africa—their referencing of castles of the Hohenstaufen period is seen as a wilful invocation of past German greatness, and thus also problematic.<sup>409</sup> The same sensitivity to these sites' Third Reich antecedence is manifest in a change in name for them in *Volksbund* literature between the 1960s and the present, from *Ehrenstätten* (places of honour),<sup>410</sup> a traditional German name for war cemeteries, to *Soldatenfriedhöfe*, *Friedhöfen* (places of peace or rest) being a traditional German name for cemeteries, or the even wholly neutral *Kriegsgräberstätten* (war

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<sup>408</sup> Seager Thomas, 2022, p. 2; Schofield, 2005, pp. 92–98

<sup>409</sup> Clodfelter, 2008, p. 477

<sup>410</sup> Kappel, 2017; Mosse, 1990, p. 85–86; Urmson, 2017

<sup>411</sup> Kappel, 2017

<sup>412</sup> VDK, 1961

cemeteries).<sup>413</sup> Soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, even those who died during the North African campaign, which is generally agreed to have been waged with some honour,<sup>414</sup> must not today be described as honourable, while German art and architecture of the period, even when good, is automatically deemed bad. (This contrasts with Italian architecture of period, much of which has now been rehabilitated).

It is not just Germany's North African war cemeteries, however, that have a political identity. The fact that Western nations freely used the region as a battleground, that they extracted from what were then weak host countries territorial concessions for cemeteries to which they applied Western rules and symbolism and then claimed as "for ever England"—or wherever—is an implicit challenge to the sovereignty both of the host nations and their peoples. This applies particularly to the cemeteries of the UK, France and Italy, countries which previously had colonial interests in the region. (In its former Tripoli war cemetery, Italy brought together the remains of those who died in Libya during its colonial wars and those who died during WW2, establishing an unambiguous equivalence between the two).<sup>415</sup> But it is relevant to them all—even ABMC cemeteries, the intention of which, it has been argued, was to establish for the US, an aesthetic, spiritual and political foothold abroad, as much as to memorialise the country's war dead.<sup>416</sup>

### *The future*

The Portland Stone used in CWGC cemeteries in North Africa (and elsewhere), is a beautiful stone and easily worked, but objects fashioned from it—such as the Stone of Remembrance—will not, *contra* Winston Churchill, "certainly be in existence 2,000 or 3,000 years hence".<sup>417</sup> Portland Stone is soft, and vulnerable to wear from windblown dust. It is porous and will absorb water and dissolved salts, rendering it vulnerable to freeze-thaw processes and salt recrystallisation, both of which can cause its surface to flake and crumble. It is inhomogeneous, containing many fossils and other

mineral grains, which expand and contract at different rates, also causing it to flake and crumble. It is a limestone, and can be dissolved by acids, such as those in humanly-generated atmospheric pollution. And because it is beautiful, and easily worked, it may be selectively robbed by people. Sollum-Halfaya war cemetery located on the long-closed border between Egypt and Libya may not be particularly threatened by acids from vehicle exhaust but it is on the edge of the desert and near the sea and is threatened by sand blasting and salt. Heliopolis by contrast, which since its construction has been enveloped by Cairo's urban sprawl, is far from any source of marine salt but is certainly threatened by humanly-generated atmospheric pollution. El Alamein, which is currently being encroached upon by the city of New Alamein, will very likely fall victim to *all* of these; likewise the CWGC cemeteries of Alexandria, Tobruk and Tripoli. Similar issues, varying depending upon their precise locations and the materials used in them (basalt, reinforced concrete, limestone, marble, tile, wood), apply to the cemeteries of all the combatant nations.<sup>418</sup>

Also under threat are cemetery locales. This threat takes three forms: the re-purposing of the land on which they are located, for pragmatic or political reasons; vandalism; and assault upon the sensory environment, which is central to the war cemetery's current role as a place of contemplation, and any future role for it as a tourist/heritage site. From North Africa, we have already examples of all three—the *de facto* expulsion of the Italian dead from Italy's Tripoli war cemetery, physical attacks on CWGC cemeteries in Egypt<sup>419</sup> and

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<sup>413</sup> Schrader, 2018; VDK, 2009

<sup>414</sup> e.g. Kitchen, 2009, p. 10; Bierman and Smith, 2002

<sup>415</sup> Delplano, 2023, pp. 7–8. A potent analogy for such an intention can be found in the Argentinian refusal to repatriate its dead from the Falkland Islands after the Falkland Islands War on the grounds that they were already in Argentina

<sup>416</sup> Robin, 1995, p. 55

<sup>417</sup> Churchill, 1920

<sup>418</sup> e.g. Schrader, 2018

<sup>419</sup> During the 1956 “Suez Crisis” (Longworth, 1985 [2010], p. 216)



**Figure 87**

The deliberate slighting of UK and former Dominion war graves in Benghazi War Cemetery in 2012, filmed and posted online by a member of an Islamist militia. The Cross of Sacrifice was also destroyed

Libya (**Figure 87**), and the encroachment of modern development on Heliopolis, formerly in the desert, but now hedged around by modern apartments, El Alamein (**Figure 73**), and Tobruk, where the German mausoleum is now dominated by an oil refinery (**Figure 88**).

And it is not just the fabric and the experience of these cemeteries that is under threat, it is their meaning. Currently North Africa's war cemeteries have relatively few visitors, so these do not pose a significant physical threat, but, increasingly, they do pose a conceptual one, which may increase the cemeteries' vulnerability to some of the aforementioned physical ones. The majority of visitors to these cemeteries today are tourists or local people with no personal connection to the dead in them. Their relationship to them can be compared to that of, for example, that of a visitor to the Colosseum in Rome. They may be awed by the conception,

interested in the period of history to which they belong, titillated by proximity of mass death (the elephant in the room in all discussions of war-related tourism), or just tourists checking-off must sees on an itinerary, but to the human tragedy inherent in them, most are *personally* indifferent. With their interest, therefore, what was uniquely valuable, is devalued, and becomes instead just another heritage resource, in competition for interest, space and funding with every other heritage resource, including many with a more universal, or a more contemporary appeal.

The question to be asked of these cemeteries today, therefore, is not will they or wont they survive, but when and how they will disappear? Till now they have relied for their survival on an assumption, a belief, that because they are *military* cemeteries and because in them lie our honoured dead, they are uniquely untouchable. For the reasons outlined above, however, this can no longer be taken for



**Figure 88**

The Tobruk *Totenburg* (upper left) dominated today by a nearby oil refinery (photo: Google Earth)

granted, and if any are to survive in the long-term, strong cases will have to be made for them, which fully consider their contemporary cultural, political and social, as well as their historical heritage contexts.

In order to qualify for preservation, a heritage resource has to meet one or more of several standard criteria, which qualify it as important or of special interest. Typically, these include authenticity, originality, rarity, representativeness or uniqueness, the possession of social value, historical interest and usefulness (e.g. for educational purposes).<sup>420</sup> Their preservation also has to be viable.

Collectively and individually, the extent to which these cemeteries fulfil these criteria varies. Collectively, long-term preservation is probably not viable and would be very difficult to justify. All of course remain more or less original and have social value—in so far as they are places of contemplation and reminders of the implications of modern warfare—but they are not rare or unique, their historical associations vary and for educational purposes we hardly need to preserve every one. Strong cases for preservation, however, can be made for individual cemeteries. The two *Totenburgen*, for example, are unique in North Africa, rare generally, and, owing to their Third Reich antecedence, a type elsewhere at risk to the ravages of political correctness. In Africa, the ABMC cemetery at Carthage and the Italian *Sacrario* at El Alamein, are also unique. The El Alamein, Sollum-Halfaya, Tobruk, Knightsbridge-Acroma and several Tunisian cemeteries are associated with particular battles and therefore of heightened historical importance. Cemeteries close to centres of population may be particularly useful for educational purposes.

Safest are probably the three El Alamein cemeteries—because of their historical importance, but also because the city of New Alamein is a desert city and can grow out as easily as in. Most vulnerable are probably the CWGC cemeteries in Alexandria, Heliopolis and Tripoli.

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<sup>420</sup> e.g. DOE, 1990, annex 4; Schofield, 1990, chapter 4

<sup>421</sup> CWGC, 1970, pp. 15–16; 1973, p. 23; 1982, pp. 13–14

As “base” as opposed to “battlefield” cemeteries, these lack the historical associations and wider educational value of, for example, the El Alamein cemeteries. They are also “expensive”. The land on which they are located is valuable, and its loss to the state potentially greater than the value of the cemeteries themselves (politically, as tourist and educational resources, etc.), while, because of their locations, and the threats associated with these, they are more than usually burdensome to the curatorial authority, the CWGC.

A likely trajectory is suggested by the periods of revolutionary government in Egypt (under Gamal Abdel Nasser) and Libya (under Gaddafi), governments that did not feel bound by pre-existing agreements and were largely indifferent to Western sensibilities surrounding their war dead. During these, WW2 war cemeteries in Alexandria, Benghazi and Tripoli were targeted for redevelopment (the plan was to move the Alexandrian dead to El Alamein).<sup>421</sup> All of these threats—except that to Italy’s Tripoli cemetery—were weathered. Another time they may not be.









**Figures 88**

Dead Italian soldier at Giarabub (photo: unknown Australian soldier)

**VERGISSMEINNICHT**













**Figures 101**

New Zealand burial party (photo: unknown New Zealand soldier)



## APPENDIX I: NEW ZEALAND GRAVES REGISTRATION & ENQUIRIES UNIT

There is a small unit of 2/NZEF, which is seldom heard of and indeed, it is known to few that such a unit actually exists. This unit is the New Zealand Graves Registration & Enquiries Unit and in spite of it's [sic] being so little known, it performs a very important and often dangerous task.

Although not actually engaged in fighting, members of this unit face all the many dangers of the desert wastes in their search for the graves and frequently, unburied bodies of the fallen.

The Graves Registration Service had it's [sic] inception in France during the last war by Sir Fabian Ware when it was realized that some system of registration of the graves of the dead must be carried out if these graves were not to become forgotten and lost with the passing of time and the ravages of the elements.

The New Zealand unit is only one of many such British and Allied Units engaged on this important work in the Middle East. There are units from the British, South African, Indian, New Zealand, United States Army and Polish Forces as well as a Concentration Unit which gathers the bodies after they are located by the Registration Units and concentrates them into permanent cemeteries where they rest for all time.

The duties of a Graves Registration Unit are to locate and register the exact site of all graves, both Allied and enemy alike and also to obtain accurate details of identification of the deceased soldiers whenever possible. In the majority of cases, this information cannot be obtained except by exhuming the bodies.

The Graves Registration Units cover the whole area of the Middle East, including Persia and Iraq and extending as far south as Tanganyika [sic] and Madagascar.

All units are controlled from a Central Head Quarters situated in Cairo where there are many specialists from the various branches of the Services, necessary to carry out this important work. There

are draftsmen [sic], clerks, and photographers. At this Central H.Q. all the different Forces are represented and here are found New Zealand clerks, etc. who are kept busily engaged in keeping up-to-date, the files of all New Zealand dead.

There are also Royal Engineer personnel who manufacture the thousands of crosses which are required to mark the graves when located, and a team of artist who are working continuously, painting the black-lettered inscriptions on the crosses as required.

The photographic branch of the H.Q. is a very large one. Here, are processed, all films taken in the field by photographers attached to the various Field Units. As permanent, white crosses are erected, they are photographed by the Unit photographers and the negatives are then sent, after processing to the various countries concerned. In the case of negatives of graves of New Zealand dead, the negatives are sent to Wellington from where copies of the photographs may be obtained by next-of-kin. It should be pointed out at this stage, that NO copies of photographs are now supplied in the Middle East.

Graves both in cemeteries and isolated sites, are marked with one of three symbols, a cross over a Christian grave, a Star of David over Jewish graves and a coffin or shield shaped board or stake over native graves such as Moslems, Sikhs, Hindus, etc. No distinction of rank or race is made other than these different head boards or crosses. After the war, when all cemeteries will be taken over by the Imperial War Graves Commission, these crosses, stars and stakes will be replaced by simple headstones of universal pattern on which will be engraved the deceased soldier's Regimental badge, and a common inscription, to which any private epitaph within reason will be added as desired by next-of-kin.<sup>422</sup>

At present, cemeteries being formed for the dead of this war are bare plots of waste desert, but after the war, they will become places of beauty similar to the cemeteries of the last war such as those in Cairo, Alexandria and on Mount Scopus, in Jerusalem. In these

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<sup>422</sup> This would not in fact to be the case with New Zealand memorials

cemeteries, the grounds are laid out in the form of beautiful lawns and gardens of flowering shrubs and plants of every description.

The New Zealand Graves Registration Unit is similar to all other G.R. & E. Units, being composed of three officers and ten other ranks. There are three N.C.O's [sic], who are Unit clerk, draftsman [sic] and photographer respectively. The Unit is entirely self contained and most of it's [sic] work is carried out far from the main bodies of troops and in many very isolated spots, far from civilization.

ALL graves must be located, whether in temporary cemeteries or in isolated sites and it is the duty of the G.R. & E. Unit to find these graves and cemeteries and register them. To do this, it is necessary to check the exact map references, make sketch plans and maps and take photographs and written details to preserve the identity and location of the dead so that they can be more easily located at a later date by the Concentration Unit which follows to take the bodies into the permanent cemeteries for re-interment.

Often it may take months of patient and arduous work to locate one single grave which has been wrongly reported by the party responsible for burial. Identification of bodies must be positive and it is therefore necessary to exhume many of these bodies to determine the identity of the deceased soldier. In many cases this is extremely difficult but the Graves Registration Unit persists until identity is established or there is no hope of doing so. Very often articles found on bodies are returned to Base and also to various Units known to have been fighting in the area in question. Such articles can be circulated among the soldiers and often identity is established by these means. Another means of identifying unknown soldiers is by the use of photographs of the dead soldiers which can also be sent to the Units known to have operated in the area concerned.

The New Zealand Graves Registration Unit was formed in 1941 and operated with 8th Army from that date. It was present when the offensive opened in November of that year and has been in the Western Desert ever since except for one short break of about three weeks in July, 1942.

Many months of patient labour were spent in the desert, far to the south of Barrani and then the Unit worked accross [sic] to the Egyptian-Libyan frontier and then along "Mussolini's Fence" towards Bardia where it was present at the second fall of the town, and subsequently at the fall of Salum and Halifaya [sic] Pass. Later, Unit H.Q. was established in some very ancient Roman burial caves, close to the small port of Salum and from this spot, the Unit operated till it was forced to withdraw in June, 1942. As the enemy drew near to Salum, the Unit had to abandon for the time being, it's [sic] role as a Graves Registration Unit and was incorporated into the defence scheme of that small port. Nights were spent in patrolling a portion of the coastline on the watch for any attempt that might be made by the enemy to land troops behind our forward lines of defence.

With the evacuation of Salum, the Unit moved back to Mersa Matruh and thence to the El Alamein line where it has been working ever since owing to the magnitude of the task which confronted it there. While fighting was in profress [progress] at Alamein, work was carried out in the southern sector of the Line but after our advance commenced in october [sic] of last year, the Unit was able to operate over the whole Alamein front and has been engaged for many months now, in burying the hundreds of dead of both sides, left on the battlefield as our Army moved forward after the fleeing remnants of the Afrika [sic] Corps.

With the large scale sowing of mines carried out by both sides between the sea in the north to the Qattara Depression in the south, the work of the Unit has become even more hazardous and much of the work now being carried out has to be done on foot as it is not possible to use trucks in many parts of the front. Within recent weeks, the Unit has lost two trucks, destroyed by enemy mines. Great care must be taken, even when work is carried out on foot, owing to the many nests of booby traps which are encountered from day to day. Recently, one member of the Unit was wounded by a booby trap which had been attached to the body of a German soldier. His body was exhumed for identification and as soon as the body

was moved, the booby trap was set off with serious consequences to the soldier concerned.

Although this Unit is both a Registration and Enquires Unit, it should be noted that ALL enquiries concerning graves should be addressed in the first instance to 2/Echelon, 2/N.Z.E.F. and not directly to the H.Q. of the Unit in the field. Owing to the procedure now adopted with regard to the disposal of photographic negatives, NO copies of graves photographs can be supplied in the Middle East.

## APPENDIX 2: NOTES ON GRAVES REGISTRATION

The following instructions are issued with regard to the work of a Graves Registration Unit, but must not be taken as overriding any instruction which may be issued in General, Routine, or other Orders issued to Chaplains, Burial Officers, etc., by formations.

### [I.] Duties and responsibilities of the Graves Services.

These involve:-

- (a) Selection of sites.
- (b) Ensuring [sic] the preservation of the records of all burials.

This latter duty involves:-

Immediate survey of the selected sites, and the preparation of a plan upon which will be marked plots, rows and graves. The Unit will later have a topographical draughtsman on its strength for this purpose.

Provision of a cemetery map, and a cemetery book and plan in each cemetery with instructions as to the entry of burial.

Verification of reports of forward cemeteries (where circumstances have forced the selection of such) and immediate record of all graves filled there.

Marking and registration of graves wherever found, and reporting isolated graves to General Headquarters, 2nd Echelon.

### II. The means of providing for the identification of graves includes:-

Provision of pegs and crosses.

Provision of surveys and reports.

~~Provision of metal tape and stamping machine.~~ [Crossed out in extant text.]

The executive work in the Field is carried out by the Graves Registration Unit, who work wherever possible on an area basis.

### III. The general duties of the Graves Registrations Units.

It is evident that a Graves Registration Unit, besides carrying out the registrations of cemeteries, may have to register graves in improvised cemeteries, or isolated and almost inaccessible graves, and will frequently have to verify a burial from hearsay or report. They may even have to recommend or organise [sic] the exhumation and re-burial of bodies on sanitary grounds.

### IV. The disposal of the dead.

- (a) It is of paramount importance that the disposal be rapidly and effectively made of the dead.
- (b) No bodies should be buried until they have been searched and wherever possible identified.
- (c) The Graves Service are not responsible for the digging of Graves or carrying out burials.

Such work and the clearing of the battlefields of the dead is the duty of the troops under such orders as are issued by Formations in the Field.

- (d) In order to carry out their duties it is most essential that representatives of the Graves Services shall be in contact with the Burial Officers, Medical Units, Chaplains, and any other personnel directly connected with the immediate or ultimate disposal of the dead.

## V. Enemy Burials.

Where possible Italian Officers and men are to be buried in the Military Cemeteries.

In these cemeteries a separate section should be set aside for these burials, and lists giving names and other particulars forwarded to General Headquarters, 2nd Echelon.

In addition to the above, there will necessarily be groups and isolated graves in the Field, therefore formation Commanders carrying out these burials should be asked to forward to 2nd Echelon a full description of the location, map references, etc., together with a list of the names and particulars; where possible all bodies to be searched before burial with a view to identification.

### I. The procedure for the Registration of Graves.

- (a) The information as to the location of a grave is obtained from the Burial Return (A.F.W.3314), which is completed by the Chaplain or other officer carrying out the Burial, and one copy of which goes to this Office at General Headquarters, 2nd Echelon.
- (b) This copy is forwarded to the G.R. Unit operating in that area, who then proceed to 'register' the grave.

The graves is registered by (I) the erection of a cross and (II) a Grave Report giving its exact position.

### (2) Crosses.

The regulation G.R.U. cross is 2ft. 6in. high out of the ground and 1ft. 4in. across the arms.



These crosses will be supplied by R.E. Services, or if any difficulty is experienced obtaining these, arrangements will be made here for a supply to be forwarded.

When a grave is found a cross will be erected. Sometimes the Grave will be found with the peg and label (A.F.W.3371) placed by the Chaplain before the Burial Return (A.F.W.3314) is received, but the cross may be erected without waiting for the return.

The inscription on the cross will be of embossed aluminium tape, made by the embossing machine present in Cairo, therefore these slips for the time being, will be prepared and forwarded on receipt of a list giving particulars of the inscriptions required.

The inscription for the cross will be as follows:-

Army no.    Rank.    Name.    Initials.

Regimental particulars.

(Using authorised abbreviations).

K/A for Killed in Action.

D/W. for Died of wounds

Died.

As the case may be  
followed by the date of  
death.

#### NOTE.

Where the particulars indicate that the deceased was of the Jewish faith, no action will be taken until the matter has been referred to A.G.13 through this Office. When War Office investigation substantiates the fact that he was of the Jewish faith, the grave will be marked by the emblem of the shield of David in lieu of a cross.

If a grave is found with a sufficient cross already in position, the cross will be marked with a metal plate bearing the letters "G.R.U." and a metal inscription will be added on the back.

### 3. Graves Reports.

The second stage of registration is the rendering by the G.R. Unit of a Graves Registration Report (A.F.W. 3372)

All graves which have been marked as above will be entered on these report forms, which will be rendered direct to this Office.

A report form must not refer to more than one place of burial, and the report forms in respect of any one place of burial will be numbered consecutively. The map reference will be given, or if the burial is in one of the existing I.W.G.C. cemeteries this fact will be indicated. The schedule number should be left blank for use by A.G. 13 at the War Office.

In any case where a cross has been erected the letter "E" should be inserted in Column 6 of A.F.W. 3372, and where a plate has been affixed to an existing cross the letters "G.R.U."

Later on, when a plot, or a cemetery itself is closed, comes a third stage, the rendering of a Comprehensive Report prepared by the G.R. Unit from the reports already rendered and checked on the ground with the plan of the plot or cemetery. In the case of forward cemeteries where opportunity arises a Provisional Comprehensive Report should be made of the cemetery or burial ground whenever possible.

Instructions regarding these Comprehensive Reports will be issued from this Office.

### 4. Information as to Graves.

The above may be taken as the normal procedure at the present time, but a G.R. Unit will not always be able to rely on

the receipt of a Burial Return (A.F.W.3314) for information as to the locality of a grave. After heavy casualties they will have to be dependent on lists from Burial Officers, and very often by searching for graves. At other times by information from Medical Units and other various miscellaneous information received.

## 5. Cemeteries.

Where possible Cemetery Plots should consist of 100 graves. The allowance per burial is a width of 2ft. and a length of 6ft. 6in., the depth being governed by local conditions, normally 6ft. 6ins. The distance between rows is 2ft. 6ins. to leave undisturbed soil for the headstone beams. In the case of trench burials, the trenches are forty feet long accommodating 20 burials, so that 5 trenches occupying an area of 40 feet by 45 feet accommodate 100 burials and constitute a plot.

The plots are divided by intermediate paths 5 feet wide between the various groups of plots.

The numbering of the plots should be as follows:-

Plot I. Row A. Grave No. and so on through the alphabet omitting I [sic] so that it should be Row H. Row J. etc., giving each row its letter, A, B, C, D etc.

## BURIAL AND THE MARKING OF GRAVES

[Unreadable/obscured] other ranks are to be reported [unreadable/obscured] A.F.W. 3314 in triplicate, one copy to the D.A.D.G.R. & E., and two to the A.A.G., G.H.Q., 2nd Echelon, Middle East.

All entries on any one A.F.W. 3314 must refer to the same place and be covered by a single map reference. Burials at different places

must be shown on separate A.Fs.W.3314.

2. In giving the map references, the edition of the map should be stated, as in some editions the squaring is different. If a correct map reference cannot be given a full description of the place must be entered on the back of the form. A description of the cross used is to be shown on the form where stated.

3. In all cases Chaplains are responsible that the particulars of name, initials, regimental number, and unit and the date of death (wherever possible) correspond with the entries shown in the books of the Unit reporting the death.

4. At the time of the burial the grave must be marked in such a way as to ensure identification. Chaplains are responsible that even where the Unit proposes to erect a cross, the grave is properly marked by other means until this is done. Pegs with labels attached are supplied for the purpose.

Chaplains are responsible that the particulars referred to in para. 3 are entered on these labels in block letters with hard black lead pencil. Indelible pencils are not to be used for this purpose. These pegs are to be fixed into the ground at an angle of 45°, with the labelled side underneath to protect the label from the weather.

5. In authorized cemeteries under the charge of the G.R.U. a box containing pegs will be kept by the soldier in charge. Chaplains attached to the Dressing Stations or Ambulances, or when accompanying burial parties near the front after heavy casualties, should see that a supply of pegs and labels are available.

6. In special cases where the erection of crosses may be difficult or has to be delayed, a record written with hard black lead pencil is, in addition, to be placed in a tin or bottle (neck downwards) half buried in the ground. Where one tin or bottle is necessarily used

to mark several graves, the record enclosed must be so marked as to ensure the proper identification of each grave.

7. Chaplains, immediately on arrival in an area, are to acquaint themselves fully with all the authorized cemeteries in that area.

8. In authorised cemeteries, numbered pegs are now being placed to show where graves are to be dug. These numbers should be shown on the burial return as graves are used. Chaplains are to call the attention of the D.A.D.G.R. & E. of the Army in whose area the graves concerned are situated, to any case which may come to their notice of graves being prepared out of order, or in the wrong place.

9. Under no circumstances are crosses erected or registered by the Graves Registration Units to be removed or altered without authority from the D.G.R. & E.

10. Where a Unit desires to erect a cross over a grave on which a Graves Registration Unit cross is already in position, the latter should be used as a foot cross, being driven deep into the ground.

11. Chaplains are to bring to the notice of the D.A.D.G.R. & E. of their Army all mistakes either in position or inscription of crosses which may come to their notice.

12. It is greatly to the interest of all [concerned] and particularly of the [unreadable/obscured] possible, in order to ensure [the identification] of the graves in future. Whenever graves are made in unauthorised places, liability may be incurred for rent of the land occupied, and exhumation will ultimately be necessary.

13. Burial parties should be informed that where burials take place in single graves, the graves should not be more than 6 feet 6 inches long, 2 feet in width, and 5 feet in depth, and should not be more than 12 inches apart, and a path not exceeding 3 feet in width

should be left between the rows of graves.<sup>423</sup>

14. The foregoing instructions present little difficulty during trench warfare, but in advance or during heavy fighting it is essential that every Chaplain should keep himself in touch with the Corps or Divisional Burial Officer, and follow out the instructions laid down by him or the Corps or Divisional Headquarters as regards the burial of Officers and men. No Chaplain should decide on a plan for the burial pf [sic] deceased Officers and men without first endeavouring to obtain the authority of the Corps or Divisional Burial Officer.

15. Bodies of Officers and men of (1) our own forces, (2) our allies, and (3) the enemy, will be collected separately and buried in separate plots.

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<sup>423</sup> cf. 5. Cemeteries, above

### **APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION TO BE RECORDED ON ARMY FORM W3372**

The AF 3372 grouped burials made at a single isolated site or in single cemetery. The information recorded on it varied but usually included the following:

For the site

- Report no
- Place of burial (the name of the location or of the cemetery)
- Map grid reference
- Schedule no
- Date of Report

Then for each individual listed:

- Unit
- Serial no
- Name and Initials
- Rank
- Date of death
- Whether a cross had been erected or a GRU plate affixed
- Plot, row and grave nos (P.R.G.)

## APPENDIX 4: NZGREU PERSONNEL NAMED IN THE DIARIES

Name	Rank	Identified role	First appearance	Last appearance
Baverstock, Thomas (Tom)	Pte	Driver	22-10-41	14-04-43
Burt, B.	Cpl then L. Sgt	Draughtsman	27-12-41	21-04-43
Crutch, Charles, J. (Jack)	Pte		06-02-42	25-05-43
Gasgoigne, Robert (Bob)	Pte		06-03-42	25-05-43
Hawkins	Cpl	Photographer	12-11-41	27-03-43
Hinton	Cpl	Clerk	10-01-42	06-02-43
Hutchinson	2 Lt		14-03-42	02-07-42
Jennings	Pte		06-03-42	06-03-42
Josland, Sydney, W. (Sid)	Capt	OC to 17-04-42	15-09-41	17-05-43
King, William, K.	2 Lt		25-04-42	06-06-42
Mathews, Douglas, B.	2 Lt		04-07-42	06-07-42
McDougall, Stuart, J.	Lieut		19-05-42	04-06-43
McLeary, Harold, G.	Pte	Driver	22-10-41	29-03-42
McNeil, J.S.	Cpl	Clerk	28-04-43	28-04-43



Name	Rank	Identified role	First appearance	Last appearance
Overton, Henry, G. (Harry)	Lt then Capt	OC from 04-06-43	09-07-42	04-06-43 (still OC 15-12-43)
Owen	Lt		23-09-41	16-03-42
Perry, Reginald (Reg)	Pte	Batman, Driver	23-07-41	22-04-43
Pidwell, Ernest, S. (Ern or Ernie)	Pte		09-07-42	16-02-43
Porter	Cpl	Draughtsman	02-06-43	02-06-43
Putt, ?Lloyd George (George)	Pte		25-05-43	25-05-43
Roydhouse, Garth, S.	Lt		06-07-42	15-05-43
Stych, Kenneth (Ken)	Lt		25-03-43	04-06-43
von Schramm, Walter, E. (Wally)	Lt then Capt	OC from 17-04-42 to 04-06-43	01-01-41	12-07-43

## APPENDIX 5: CEMETERY LOCATIONS

### *Sollum–Sidi Barrani area (Figure 54)*

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig. 54	Designation	NZGREU	Source
	purple grid					
El Cuasc	4306	3262	–		✓	GCRF
Gambut	4630	4137	–			GCRF
Sidi Azeiz	5020	3890	1		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Bardia Road House	5144	3978	2		✓	GCRF
Bardia British	5193	3956	3		✓	GCRF
Bardia	5200	3960	4	German		
Bardia Area	5188	3909	5		✓	GCRF
Bardia Area	5179	3888	6		✓	GCRF
Fort Capuzzo	5147	3767	7		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Fort Capuzzo New	5137	3740	8		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Sollum/Musaid	5184	3754	9	Australian 6th Division Cemetery	✓	GCRF; Schramm
Sollum cemetery	5185	3750	10		✓	GCRF
Sollum Barracks	5246	3757	11		✓	GCRF

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig. 54	Designation	NZGREU	Source
Halfaya-Sollum	5252	3729	12	Concentration cemetery	✓	GCRF; Schramm
Kilometre 6	5315	3660	13		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Conference cairn E cemetery	5280	3305	14			GCRF
Conference cairn NW cemetery	5285	3308	15		✓	Schramm
Buq Buq	5565	3677	16	3rd Hussars Cemetery		GCRF
Buq Buq	5741	3695	17			GCRF
Hatayet el Rala	5614	3246	18		✓	Schramm
Sofafi NW Camp	5635	3365	19		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Sofafi E Camp	5695	3355	20			Schramm
Bir Enba	5899	3410	21		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Alam el Dab	5945	3768	22	Argyle and Sutherland Cemetery		GCRF
Zawyet Barrani	5960	3750	23	12		GCRF
Sidi Barrani W	5985	3790	24			GCRF

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig. 54	Designation	NZGREU	Source
Kilometre 124	6040	3760	25	Coldstream Guards Cemetery		GCRF
Piccadilly/ Oxford Circus	6110	3340	26		✓	GCRF; Schramm
Minqar El Zannan	6170	3274	27	British CCS	✓	GCRF; Schramm

Note: GCRF = Graves Concentration Report Form; Schramm = this volume

*El Alamein–Alexandria area (Figure 58)*

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig 58	Designation	NZGREU	Source
	purple grid					
Maaten Baggush	7630	3300	–			GCRF
El Daba			–	British		GCRF
El Daba			–	German		
El Daba	8375	3150	–	Italian		
Sidi Abd Rahman	8654	3088	1	German and Italian		Caccia-Dominioni, 1966
Deir el Harra	8540	2790	2	Italian		Qattara, 2013
Deir el Beida	8615	2850	3	Italian		Qattara, 2013
Deir el Abyad	8653	2847	4	Italian		Qattara, 2013
Deir el Mireir	8670	2756	5	Italian		Qattara, 2013
Hisiyet	8624	2716	6	Italian		Qattara, 2013
El Qattara or Qattara Road	8615	2676	7	German	✓	Schramm
Gebel Sanhur	8609	2587	8	Italian	✓	Schramm; Qattara, 2013
Gebel Kalakh	8690	2576	9	Italian		Qattara, 2013

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig 58	Designation	NZGREU	Source
Deir Alinda	8738	6404	10	Italian		Qattara, 2013
Hill 33 Tell el Eisa	8790	3004	11	German and Italian Concentration cemetery		Caccia-Dominioni, 1966
Bir Usasa	8787	2995	12			GCRF
El Alamein	8860	2946	13	Concentration cemetery	✓	GCRF; Schramm
NZ Brigade cemetery	8837	2738	14	NZ Brigade cemetery	✓	GCRF; Schramm
NZ ADS	8850	2710	15	NZ ADS	✓	GCRF; Schramm
Heliopolis Gate	8885	7215	16	Greek		Schramm; Qattara, 2013
	red grid					
Point 102	4280	8815	17	NZ MDS	✓	GCRF; Schramm
Mirbat Aza	4260	8715	18			Schramm
Kilo 92	4326	9022	19	"Smelly"; probably one of several cemeteries in vicinity	✓	GCRF; Schramm
Alam el Tritriya	4408	8838	20			GCRF
El Gharbaniyat	4700	9098	21	NZ CCS		GCRF

Cemetery name	East	North	No on Fig 58	Designation	NZGREU	Source
Amiriya	5010	9234	22	Concentration cemetery	✓	Schramm
Alam el Mireibet	5128	8997	23		✓	Schramm
Chatby	5116	9443	24	Re-used WWI cemetery	✓	Schramm
Hadra	5121	9439	25	Re-used WWI cemetery	✓	Schramm

Note: GCRF = Graves Concentration Report Form; Schramm = this volume





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